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AURORA BOREALIS

by John Fleming Wilson

COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

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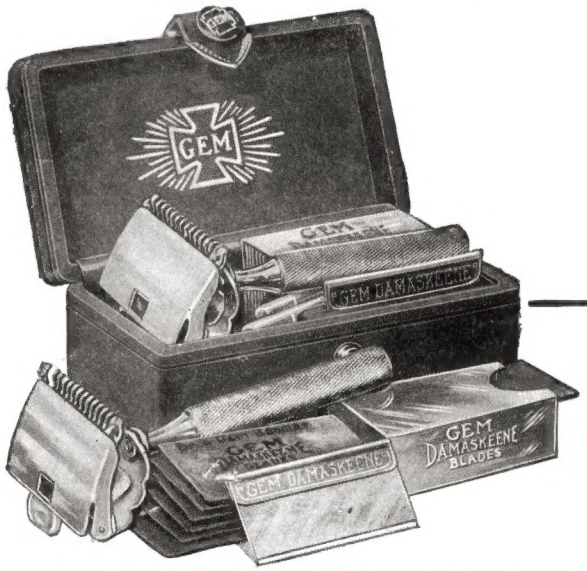

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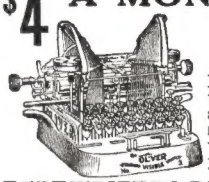

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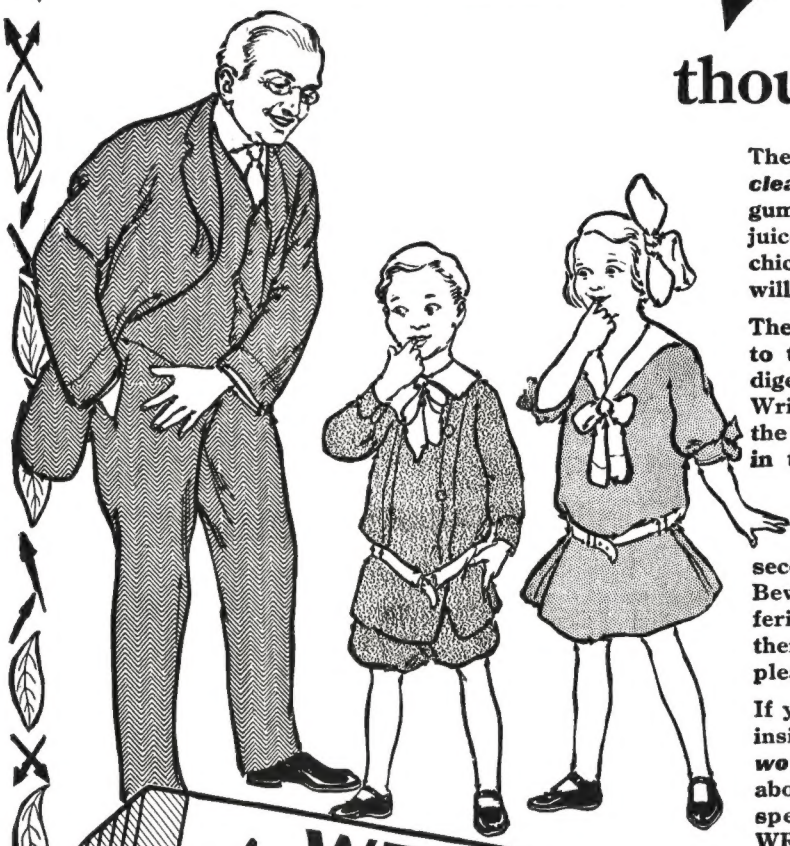

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Vol. XXXIX CONTENTS FOR MARCH 14 No. 3

ONE NOVELETTE

Aurora Borealis . . . . . John Fleming Wilson . . 385

FOUR SERIAL STORIES

Serenade. Part I . . . . . Rothvin Wallace . . . 418
Where a moving picture leads a man to his fate.

The Motor Kuklux. Part II . . . . Herbert Flowerdew . . . 434
How a nameless Nemesis terrorizes automobile drivers.

The Night Wind's Promise. Part III . . Varick Vanardy 463
By which a million dollars and a man's liberty are recovered

All for His Country. Part IV . . . J. U. Giesy 491
When a woman's love saves her nation's honor.

FIVE SHORT STORIES

Grim Fate on the Grover C. . . . . Forrest Halsey 531

Still Water . . . . . Harold Titus 543

The Fur Coat . . . . . Frank Condon 549

With the Best Intentions . . . . . Martha McCulloch-Williams 558

Tinfoil Charley . . . . . Gardner Hunting . . . 564

POETRY

Were Love to Go . . LaFayette Lentz Butler 433
From the Fortieth Floor . James Norman Hall 553
A Rose . . . . . Glenn Norbrey Pleasants 563
Entirety . . . . . Gladys Hall 576

Heart to Heart Talks . . . . . The Editor 554

ISSUED WEEKLY BY THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY
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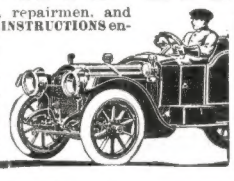

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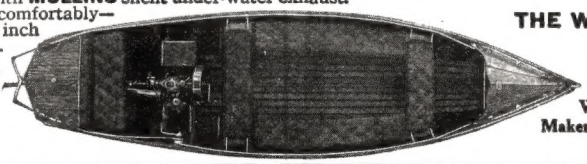

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AURORA BOREALIS

A NOVELETTE

BY JOHN FLEMING WILSON
Author of "Princess of Sorry Valley."

CHAPTER I.

A Business Arrangement.

HEREDITY, as inexorable in its workings as the laws of planetary space and as mysterious, denied the soft imaginings of feeble Mrs. Rollins and the grim hopes of dour Thomas Rollins. It gave that strangely mated pair a single child, a daughter without a trace of her mother's clingings and leanings, a daughter who despised her father's enormous passion for wealth and power and the feel of human flesh beneath his feet.

From the day of her birth till she was eighteen years old she was Aurora Rollins, the pictured, the envied, the heiress of a tremendous fortune. And then she became to all who knew her Aurora Borealis, brilliantly and coldly beautiful; physically astounding in her perfection; a girl with half her gorgeous world at her feet, yet unmoved by the adoration of men and the hate of women.

Her father would have magnificently used her, as emperors use their daughters—to cement royal alliances. She ignored him and his plans.

Her mother—incurably romantic—babbled her dreams to unheeding ears, her fancies of a home not so chill as her own, of a young son-in-law who would pat her hand and be boyish in her presence, of a grandchild she might pray over.

Aurora's still, azure eyes grew stiller when the sumptuously clad old lady spoke of such things.

"She will never marry," mourned Mrs. Rollins.

"She'll throw herself at the head of some nincompoop," growled Thomas in his surliest tone.

"She is so rude and stiff to people who would like to be her friends," her mother went on.

The bleak eyes of Mr. Rollins gleamed an instant. "She can be as rude as she likes," he snapped. "She doesn't have to kotow to anybody. But she's so damnably good looking that I don't understand it all.

"Harrison would help me a lot. And she's turned him down, and he is the only man in America I'd thoroughly like her to marry. I must keep an eye out. She's too fine a piece of property to be careless of; there are too many fortune-hunters about."

But neither the motherly cluckings of Mrs. Rollins nor the harsh guardianship of Thomas availed when Aurora met the unknown, taciturn, mysterious Ronald Macbeth.

"Do you know anything about him?" roared Thomas to his daughter when she calmly announced that she intended to marry the stranger.

Aurora met her father's cold glare with eyes that were very still, like a frozen lake. "Very little—to tell," she said simply.

"The fellow is poor!" her father exclaimed.

"Is he? He didn't say," she returned in even tones.

"He's a nobody!" Mr. Rollins went on wrathfully. "Why, the fellow doesn't even know how to conduct himself with other men," he exploded in a harsh laugh. "He's a boor! You ought to hear what they say about him!"

"I know that," Aurora replied evenly. "He doesn't belong in a crowd. I have told him I'll marry him next month."

"Not a cent! Tell him *that!*" snarled her father.

"We hadn't talked about money yet," she responded; "but of course we must." She glanced at the clock on the great desk. "I am to meet him in an hour for tea."

"How can you endure being seen with him?" Rollins demanded, suddenly dropping his blustering. "He makes you ridiculous. Why, the fellow—"

"I'll tell you what he says about the money later," Aurora returned briefly, and went out, magnificent in every movement.

Her father watched her, and a strange expression of wonder came over his face. "Good Lord, what a beauty!" he muttered to himself.

It was precisely four o'clock of the same September afternoon that Ronald Macbeth got out of a taxi in front of the Rollins residence and handed the driver his exact fare with a nod of dismissal. Aurora was coming down the great steps, her azure eyes fixed on the figure of the young man who waited to greet her.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said the taxi driver, "but you gave me only seventy cents."

"That is all you earned," Macbeth returned without turning his head. His gaze was focused on Aurora. The chauffeur grinned to himself and waited.

"I'm mighty glad to see you," Macbeth said to Aurora. "I need a walk, and so do you."

"I prefer walking to the car," she returned quietly. "But your taxi is waiting."

Instantly Macbeth swung round. Aurora scrutinized his strong, evenly set shoulders and listened without a trace of surprise to the exchange between the excited driver and her *fiancé*.

"Your fare is precisely seventy cents," Macbeth repeated in a calm tone.

"Get in!" snapped the driver. "The station house'll fix this."

"If it does," Macbeth replied without a sign of embarrassment, "it will also fix you. And if you don't move along instantly I'll see that you go there anyway."

The chauffeur stared up at the great house and then at Aurora, whom he knew well by sight. His bluff had failed.

Being of New York, he could not understand precisely why this ordinarily dressed young man was not ashamed to talk of small sums with a taxi driver in the presence of the wealthiest heiress in America. But he perfectly understood that he had lost out, and so chugged swiftly away.

Without a word of explanation or apology the young man smiled at Aurora and asked her where she would prefer to have tea.

"At the Mazdah," she suggested. "We shall have a great many things to talk about this afternoon, Ronald. So let's walk slowly. In the first place, I promised father that I would ask you something and tell you something."

Macbeth's keen eyes lit and his rather austere mouth curved. "Oh, the usual things? Aurora, I can prove that I'm worth about one hundred thousand dollars."

She nodded, coloring faintly. "It didn't occur to me to ask," she said in a low voice. "But I was to tell you that I wouldn't have a cent if I married you."

"And sixty millions if you didn't marry me?" he went on, smiling slightly. "Well, that's settled, isn't it? I never expected that your father would consider me as a son-in-law.

"By the way, I *made* my little hundred thousand myself. But it's enough for the present.

"Now, before we make the final arrangements, let's have everything settled between us. You've enlightened me pretty well, and I think I understand what I've got to do on my part—if that money business is satisfactory to you."

"Perfectly," she assented. "When I asked you to marry me I had already thought about the money part of it, in a way. I knew father would get angry and refuse me any, too. Shall we say any more about it?"

"Not a word," he responded promptly. "But there's a lot of things I must explain to you. In the first place, I must have you fully understand and agree to back me up in the things I do that—that the others in your set don't do. I want you to accept my way of doing things as reasonable.

"You see, Aurora, I have lived my thirty-two years by myself, and I can afford not to care what other people think. Of course I care what *you* think. I am going to try to make our marriage a success. As you told me, it is an experiment.

"You've chosen me to be your best friend and partner, and I've agreed. Nobody knows as well as I do the odds against you. Everybody knows that you could have a billionaire husband, and they will inevitably think and shout out loud that you have married for love."

"And that you have married me for my money," she said, glancing at him curiously.

"Ye-es, that's what they'll say," he admitted, flushing. "But that is my business. But you agree to back me up. I am going to do some things that will appear pretty hard to you. I'm sure you'll be doubtful many times, and—you may lose your nerve. That's a chance *I'm* taking."

"I don't think I'll fail you," she answered gently. "I shouldn't have proposed the plan at all if I hadn't been pretty sure of myself. Shall we go in and have our tea?"

CHAPTER II.

Macbeth of the North.

THE head waiter of the Mazdah bent profoundly before Miss Rollins, but his well-trained back stiffened at sight of her companion.

Macbeth ignored him absolutely and selected a choice table. When they were seated and had been served, Aurora looked at her escort with one of the few smiles he had ever caught on her face.

"That waiter can't understand your not tipping him," she said calmly. "I have been really amused at the way people try to understand you."

"Oh, those people!" he returned indifferently. "What do I care what they think about me? I don't see any use in paying extra for what I'm entitled to—or I can get, anyway."

Aurora sipped her tea thoughtfully.

"Even father doesn't understand," she remarked. "And Willie Harrison was so shocked at something you did at the club that he didn't think it was proper for me to hear. You—"

Macbeth smiled charmingly. "Harrison is ashamed to be seen with anybody who doesn't prove within ten minutes that he can spend a thousand dollars an hour.

"I complained about a servant at the club and the servant explained—quite properly from his point of view—that I refused any tips and demanded extra service at the same time. Harrison couldn't get it through his head why I spent fifteen minutes in avoiding an overcharge of five dollars.

"I see Harrison's point of view: he has to spend money. I don't."

"And yet I don't think you are miserly," Aurora returned, giving him the fulness of her glorious eyes.

"That isn't the question," he said. "One has to spend a certain amount of money. That's what money is for—to spend when we can't get what we want any other way. But there are some things it won't buy, and some things I don't care for. Money won't buy a friend, and I don't care for even a head waiter's smiles."

"I was sure it wasn't any principle you'd set your heart on," she continued, bowing slightly to an acquaintance. "It's just that you won't spend the money for things you don't care for."

"Money, time, or thought—any of the three is wasted if it only brings in what won't last," he agreed. "If I—well, if I wanted anything badly enough, I'd spend every last cent I had—all I could find and then go in debt some more."

She nodded gravely. "I'm afraid you are going to spend a good deal too much on—on a wife you don't really want."

"That is my lookout," he returned curtly. "And you're investing a little yourself: a few millions, a few seasons of society, and so on."

"What are we going to do when we're married?" she asked abruptly.

"I've bought a small steamer in San Pedro," he answered. "As I've told you, I must get back into the north this winter. We'll go directly to Los Angeles, and then in our steamer to Japan and thence above the Kuriles. We'll spend the winter above Cape Lopatka."

"That wasn't in our geography," she remarked. "But of course you know the country."

"Better than any one else, Aurora. It's the last country left in this world that a man can know all by himself. I—I run it, just as your father runs his trusts. Only I run my affair alone."

He stretched his brawny arms on the table and smiled grimly across at her.

"Aurora, I'm the boss, the board of directors, the government, and the weather up there. I—I think you will like it.

"Of course you'll have lots to learn and lots to unlearn. But when the year of our bargain is up, and you tell me you want to quit, you'll know you've been the wife of somebody, and people won't have to mention stocks and bonds and names of corporations and all that to make you remember me. Just let anybody say 'north,' and you'll think of me."

Her tone was cold as ice. "This is the first time I've heard you boast."

"Boast?" he repeated. "I'm not boasting. I'm telling you the truth. Listen to me, Aurora. Suppose I go to our acquaintance, Willie Harrison, and say 'church' to him. Whom does he think of right away? Tell me!"

"Dr. Rainway, if it's Willie," she agreed.

"And if I said to you, 'Aurora, church!' whom will you think of?"

"Why, Dr. Morrison, I suppose," he said slowly.

"Exactly. New York is so little and so divided that you can halt a man before any one of a thousand churches in this city and he'll never think of the person that made those churches, and for whose work they stand: God. It's

always Dr. Rainway or Dr. Morrison or Dr. Trailer; never God Almighty. But when anybody speaks to any one else of north of Lopatka they think of Ronald Macbeth."

Aurora Rollins stared at him with parted lips. Her eyes shone with the splendor of her dream—the dream evoked by this sudden, matter-of-fact, amazing boast.

She saw the tightly knit, austere, vital figure of the man before her in a new light. She knew that he had never said this much before; that he would never say it again; she understood that it was with no intent to dazzle her; to gild a forbidding future that he had so swiftly spread before her a new world.

It was the truth he was speaking, this man whom waiters tried to ignore, whom even her shrewd father attempted to scorn, whom New York laughed at.

Neither of them noticed the waiter hovering close by. Their eyes were fixed on the distance. Aurora's face was pale with a new emotion. Macbeth's firm skin was faintly flushed and his strong fingers whitened at the knuckles.

The spell broke when a young lady in a wonderful gown stopped and nodded to Aurora.

"I'm glad to see you again, Aurora," she murmured, paying no attention to Macbeth. "You'll be with us at Piping Rock, of course?"

The light in Aurora's eyes grew cold. "No," she answered distantly. "Will you let me introduce my future husband, Mr. Macbeth? Ronald, I'm presenting you to Mrs. Donnelly."

Macbeth rose, bowed, and stood the scrutiny of Mrs. Donnelly with level eyes. Her face flushed slowly.

"This *is* news," she said with attempted cordiality.

"We sail for our home in the north next month," Aurora remarked, lifting her cool gaze. "We shall be sorry not to see you again."

Too stunned even for formal congratulations, Mrs. Donnelly went on, full of her astounding news.

When she was gone Aurora said: "Ronald, we must put the announcement in the papers to-night. I'll see to it myself. But there's one thing you haven't—that's usually—well, that I'd like."

"What?"

"A ring," she responded, smiling a little.

Promptly he fumbled in a pocket, finally dragging forth a small, carefully wrapped case which he fingered doubtfully.

"I liked the stone," he murmured, half to himself. "Will it do?"

For an instant she hesitated, and then she smiled. "Let me see it," she said clearly.

Even the head waiter, a marvel of calmness, gasped when she whom he knew to be the heiress of Thomas Rollins slowly unwrapped and opened a little case from which she extracted a ring whose setting was a single diamond of the purest water and evidently of great value.

"It's a very lovely ring," she said simply, and put it on the fourth finger of her left hand.

"I liked it for you," he said just as simply, and carefully counted the exact amount of the check out for the waiter, who stared dumbly and vacuously trying to realize the meaning of the extraordinary thing he had just witnessed.

Aurora smiled at Ronald as she rose and said indifferently: "Would you mind tipping the waiter? One ought to celebrate one's engagement *some* way."

"Certainly," he replied, and laid a twenty-dollar gold-piece on the table.

Out on the street she looked at him thoughtfully. "Shall we say the first of next month? That's Monday—ten days hence."

"That will be quite perfect," he responded. "Shall I call a car? I must see your father. I presume he will be at home by this time."

"I suppose it would be best," she agreed. "I've already told him. But I should like you to see him yourself." Her lips curved. "I think father ought to have some acquaintance with his son-in-law, don't you?"

"I do," he returned briefly. "Of course I sha'n't try to convince him of anything. He wouldn't understand. But I can at least make it plain that we are going our own way."

CHAPTER III.

Seeing Her Father.

MR. ROLLINS had thought very earnestly about what his daughter had told him, and he received Macbeth with a mixture of majesty and careless good humor that deceived neither Aurora nor her *fiancé*.

"Ronald will tell you our plans, father," she said, held out her hand, shook Ronald's and vanished.

"From what my daughter — Miss Rollins — tells me, there seems to be some—er—notion that you are going to be married," Thomas said bruskly.

"A week from Monday — the first of October," Macbeth answered, calmly seating himself. "We have just agreed on an early date. We shall sail for Japan the following week."

Thomas lowered. "I don't believe you understand the situation."

"Perfectly. But, as I told Aurora this afternoon, it will be impossible to explain it to you. I thought it best merely to inform you of the facts."

"Usually in matters that concern me I have something to do with—er—what you call the 'facts,' young man."

"Your position in this affair is merely that of a man unwilling that any of his fortune should be within the control of a son-in-law he doesn't approve of," was the calm response. "We understand that. Let's drop the subject. I'm sure I don't want any of your money, and Aurora says she doesn't."

"Preposterous!" roared Rollins, thumping the heavy library table with his fist. "You can't do it."

"The facts will speak for themselves," Macbeth went on, evidently unmoved. "But there are two things you can do which will oblige us both. I know that you own a couple of newspapers."

"What of it? What of it? I swear I have a notion to—"

"No," said Macbeth, and there was that in his tone that made Rollins suddenly relax and study his visitor. "The things that you can do have a little, not much, concern with my future wife's plans.

"In the first place, you and I are aware that the public—your public, not mine—will consider this marriage with me a love match. There can be no other explanation among your own crowd of the wedding of an heiress with a man quite unknown in New York social and financial circles.

"If she married a banker or a railroad president no one would think about the matter further than to assent to its being what you might term a fair bargain on both sides. But unless you are careful there will doubtless be a very prevalent notion that your daughter is marrying me for love.

"I hope you will see that it is most comfortable for us all that nothing be allowed in the papers directly referring to our marriage in such fashion."

Thomas Rollins leaned forward, his face strangely flushed. "Will you please tell me, young man, why my daughter *is* marrying you for?"

"I assure you it is not for love," Macbeth answered. "Whether you could understand her reasons or not I leave to her judgment. That matter is in her hands.

"But I trust you will absolutely forbid any stories being published which would infer that emotion had blinded her judgment. It might prove embarrassing to you, as well, if you allowed people to think that *you* thought that."

In the brief silence that followed

Rollins turned up the heavily shaded table lights and looked at the morocco binding of a new book.

When he spoke it was with an odd tinge of respect in his voice. "And what is the second thing I can do for you?"

"You can make it equally plain that I have not asked nor received a penny of your fortune either for myself or for my wife."

Once more Thomas Rollins stared at the book in his hands. "That is fair," he said quietly. "But all this is contingent on your marrying my daughter. May I be quite frank with you?"

"So far as you think best," was the answer, which again made Thomas Rollins think carefully of what he was about to say.

"In the first place," Rollins said slowly, "my daughter is the biggest heiress—publicly estimated, of course—in America. She could marry a prince of the royal blood, if she would. In any case she should marry—she has been fitted to marry—in her own class and station. Now I—" Rollins temper snapped and he rasped, "Who the devil are *you*, anyway?"

"My name is Ronald Macbeth," was the reply. "I have a little money—little in comparison with yours. I also have my own affairs. I assure you that Aurora is satisfied."

"Who put you up at the Regis Club? How did you get introduced among good people?"

The young man smiled. "I see. You want references as to my social standing. I haven't any at all."

Rollins leaned grimly across the table. "What *have* you got, young man?"

Macbeth rose and met the elder man's eyes.

"I have my self-respect, the respect of two or three real men, and your daughter's promise to marry me. I sha'n't see you again till next year. Good day!"

But Thomas Rollins was not so easily to be forced into surrender. He rose, too, his big frame stiff with cold anger.

"I have decided how to deal with you," he said. "You won't listen to reason. So I'm going to show you who I am. I'll *break* you!"

Appeared Aurora in the great doorway. Both men looked at her, and the elder man's pride of possession grew into a murky flame of wrath.

"Yes, I'll break you, young fellow. All America can't hold you. I'll drive you down into the lowest pit of hell." He leaned still further across the table, which creaked under his weight. "I'll *break* you!"

"That is where you are wrong," Macbeth answered quietly. "You could break half the men in America. All they've got is money and position. You can take their money away from them, and possibly you can thrust them from their high places.

"But when you deal with me you are dealing with a man who stands alone, who owes no man a cent, who is simply entirely out of your world.

"You can tear down the Flatiron Building, if you wish to. But you are powerless to touch or change a single color in the rainbow.

"Don't you see," he went on impatiently, "where your power stops?"

Aurora smiled her cold smile and shook her head gently. "It stops *here*," she said, laying her hand on her white bosom.

Rollins swallowed and turned dully away. "I suppose it does," he muttered.

"And you will see that the papers don't give a false view of the affair?" the young man went on steadily.

For one instant the magnate glared murderously. Then he collected himself.

He understood something of the persistence of the man he was dealing with. He suddenly realized that this strange suitor for his daughter's hand had made but a single request; that during the whole interview he had con-

sistently refused to lose sight of it; that even now he returned to it.

With a deadening sense of defeat he nodded curtly.

"*If* she marries you," he said huskily.

CHAPTER IV.

The Honeymoon.

IT was precisely eleven o'clock of the 1st of October when Aurora Macbeth, as she had just signed herself for the first time, came down the steps of the church beside her husband.

They were quite alone except for a couple of plain-clothes policemen and a reporter for an evening paper. The latter was tucking a bit of copy paper into his waistcoat pocket and wondering how the strangely wedded couple intended to leave the church. No vehicle of any kind was in sight.

He listened curiously for the groom's first words.

"We'll walk across to Fifth Avenue," Macbeth said calmly. "Have you sent everything to the station?"

Aurora nodded, and they stepped briskly off. The reporter stared after them.

"No wonder they call her Aurora Borealis," he thought to himself. "One would think she had been looking at an exhibit of etchings rather than getting married. Wonder why the boss was so calm about all this?"

He would have wondered more than ever had he been present when Ronald Macbeth knocked on the door of his wife's stateroom that evening at nine o'clock and entered when he heard a cool "Come in!"

"You will be quite comfortable, Aurora?" he asked after a rapid glance around the room.

"Quite," she answered.

"Can you make out without your maid?"

"Easily. Won't you sit down a while?"

"If I may," he replied quietly. "I've just been sending some more wires to Rossiter. We'll reach Los Angeles Friday morning, and I want him to have the ship ready to sail that evening. Incidentally, I thought I would ask you to take this."

She glanced at him curiously and then at the package he offered her.

"What is it?"

"Yours," he returned. Then a slow flush mounted to his forehead. "I didn't know just how to manage it. It's in gold and Bank of England notes."

She accepted it and smiled. "How much is there?"

"Half of what I had in bank," he answered, still flushing. "Fifty thousand. As we agreed, I am to share evenly with you. That's your share."

"Thank you, Ronald. Is it safe here?"

"Perfectly. I have the numbers of the notes if they go astray. The gold doesn't amount to a great deal."

Aurora considered the toe of a costly slipper and seemed deep in thought. Presently she said in a low voice: "I've been thinking about our bargain, Ronald. Understand, I intend to hold you strictly to it. But I was curious to know whether you repented of it."

She allowed her eyes to meet his. He saw nothing in their cloudless stillness that he had not seen before.

"No," he responded curtly. "But I confess that I was slightly troubled by the thought of your ignorance. You see you picked me out of a whole cityful, and it occurred to me that very likely some one had said something that had misled you. Women are—romantic, sometimes."

She laughed softly. "I assure you that no one said anything to me that could possibly lead me to any romantic expectations. I think I saw precisely what was evident to any one who had sense: you cared nothing for anything that you didn't want.

"Most women would have perished of mortification had their escorts so consistently ignored the usual customs

as you did. That attracted me. Then I think another thing influenced me. It was the knowledge that you really despised me."

"No-o-o," he returned hesitatingly. "You were, of course, the most magnificent creature I had ever seen. I admitted that. I'll confess that what made me agree to your remarkable proposal was that you were my equal. You saw things just as I did.

"But you were ignorant, too. And when you came to me and coolly informed me that you were the heiress, and that you wished to marry me, and laid down the plain articles you would agree to, I said to myself that you were worth the experiment. You were frank in saying that you wanted one year absolutely out of your own world, as you called it, and I saw that that was really a big thing for you to do."

He flushed again. "I may as well tell you that it seemed to me a *clean* thing. You didn't blink at any of the rules of the game. We're married. I'm your husband. Only you and I know that we are merely partners.

"I am to show you what real things the world has in it, just as I would show a man. I'm not to make love to you, nor to ever refer between ourselves to the fact that we *are* married. And I'm to return you to New York in one year, free as any girl, to choose your life thereafter.

"While we're speaking of this I'll just repeat the rest of it so that you will know that I comprehend the terms and intend to live up to them."

"I know that you will," she said quietly. "But it's always best to have no misunderstandings, isn't it?"

"Exactly. I'm not to make love to you, call you by any pet names, kiss you or in any way invade your privacy. I am to provide for you as my wife, I'm to protect you and show you the real things in life."

Aurora nodded. "There is one other thing, Ronald," she said quietly. "If you *should* fall in love with me, you are never to tell me of it." She looked at him smilingly. "You know you *might*."

"Not I," he returned gravely. "I considered the matter thoroughly.

"Now, on the other hand, you are to back me up, not to show any shame of me, to stand up for me as your husband, and never under any circumstances to try to alter my plans or coax me to do what you wish by coquetry, any show of affection, or any arguments such as women use when reason fails them."

"That's all understood," she assented. "Shall I see you at breakfast in the morning?"

"Thanks. At eight o'clock. You'll have to get used to early hours. I'm in the next car if anything happens. Good night."

When he was gone Aurora took out two letters that had been handed her just before the train left the station in New York City.

One was from her mother. She considered its somewhat hysterical sentences calmly and put it back in her hand-bag. The other was from her father. She opened it. Out of the envelope fell a white card scrawled with these words:

> When you make up your mind that you've made a mistake use the enclosed and come home.
>
> THOS. ROLLINS.

She looked thoughtfully at the second enclosure. It was a check for fifty thousand dollars, made out to Miss Aurora Rollins.

Finally she tucked the check into her hand-bag. "If I *should* have to back out I can pay him back," she said.

In the empty smoking compartment of the library car Ronald Macbeth was staring at a white card on which were also scrawled in the magnate's coarse hand the words:

> Present this at the California Bank in Los Angeles, and sign papers releasing my daughter, and bank will pay you $100,000.

This card he carefully tucked into his wallet. "I'll just see whether the

old man means that," he thought. "If he does it'll do no harm to let him know that I don't want his money."

He lit a final cigar and smoked slowly till the sleepy attendant shut off the light at his shoulder. But when he was once ensconced in his upper berth in the swaying car he did not go to sleep.

He was saying over and over to himself: "I've got one year! One year!"

CHAPTER V.

Cape Lopatka.

TWO months later the little steamer Moscow rolled scuppers under in the heavy seas outside of Cape Lopatka.

Ronald Macbeth stood on the bridge alone. His unshaven face was covered with rime, his eyebrows were icicled, his mittened hands pearled with frozen spray.

He was staring inward at the sierra that marked the crest of the great Siberian headland. It lifted its bleak eminence into the frosty, pale sky like a tremendous breaker suddenly frozen just before it streamed into hissing foam and driving spume.

At its base he saw the long, pinkish strip of shore ice, that shifting treacherous barrier that arctic winter spins along that iron coast.

The Moscow herself was apparently fagged out by her long struggle with the northern seas. Her high bows were lumbered with ice, in which the anchors lay like dark shadows. Her forward rigging groaned under the weight of the frozen drift, and even the bridge seemed to creak at every swing under its burden.

Macbeth stared at the compass and then at the cape. With a quick brush of one hand he cleared his lips of the frost and called down to the deserted deck: "Mr. Rossiter! Mr. Rossiter!"

There presently emerged from the dark portal of the forecastle a bulky figure which slipped and stumbled aft, taking occasion in its passage to kick a frozen scupper-shutter open.

Macbeth waited till the mate had painfully elevated himself up the steps, and then said hoarsely: "What do you make of the weather?"

The mate stared through red-rimmed eyes at the sky and shook his head. "Easterly gale, sir."

"All right. We'll try the pass today, then. Clear away all that muck for'ad, will you? Got to have clear decks."

The mate nodded slowly. "Then you ain't going into Petropaulowski, sir?"

"Couldn't make it," Macbeth returned shortly.

Rossiter fingered his frozen beard thoughtfully. "Now the crew, *they* think—"

"Do they?" Macbeth remarked coldly. "Then the crew can walk—when the walking's good. I'm going into the station."

"Yes, sir. Certainly, sir. But you see, it's *new* crew. They ain't used to you, sir."

"They'll get used to me," was the sharp rejoinder. "Clear away the ice, Mr. Rossiter. I want to haul in at noon."

After one more glance around, and a gruff word to the man at the wheel below, Macbeth stepped backward through the door of a small chart-house, slammed it, and proceeded to remove mittens, cap, and muffler. Then he went down a short flight of steps into the lower cabin.

As he entered, Aurora turned from where she stood by a small steam heater and asked: "What are you going to do?"

"We're going into the station this afternoon," was the response. "We ought to make it by an hour after dark. Are you cold?"

She shivered a little and made no answer. Macbeth smiled and whistled down the speaking-tube that projected from the bulkhead.

"Say, chief!" he called down.

"We'll be in by to-night. Just warm us up, will you? Steam on all the cabin heaters!"

When he heard the hiss of the inpouring steam he joined his wife and remarked: "I'm hoping to have you safely in the station by to-morrow noon."

She looked at him half fearfully. "You know everybody expects to go to Petropaulowski."

"The crew, maybe. I'm everybody, Aurora, and I'm intending to get a good lee and go to the station."

She shivered again. "Ronald, you can't do it. I've heard those men talking. Since you—since that—"

"Aurora," he said sharply, "I put that fellow out of business because he thought he was running this ship. And if that crew thinks I'm not still on the job they'll soon know."

"They are twenty, and you are only one," she whispered.

"That's small odds. Remember, it's usually one man against a hundred, or a thousand or a million."

"Mr. Rossiter said—"

He smiled and she flushed at the bleak light in his eyes.

"Rossiter knows who is who. Now you'd better pack up your stuff while I take the ship in. Is your cabin warm?"

"It's all right," she said dully.

Once in her own room she shut the door and peered fearfully into the corners. It was a very comfortable cabin, furnished with what most people would have thought luxury.

But the dim light that trickled through the streaming port glasses showed to Aurora only the dreary surroundings of a terrible month — a month in which she had seen raw humanity trodden underfoot, when to her ears had come the muffled bellows of men trying to regain lost mastery.

And it seemed as if at this moment she must await the opening of the door and the husky voice of Ronald Macbeth saying: "Well, everything's all right now. Ready for chow?"

She stared at the locked case of firearms against the wall and felt her own revolver snug against her breast. Macbeth had laughed at her for carrying it.

But among the many lessons the delicately reared child of Thomas Rollins had learned was that one of fear.

Then something of her master's imperious voice echoed in her ears again, and obediently she began to pack.

It was two o'clock when Ronald came for her. When she opened the door he nodded approvingly at the orderly packages that replaced the disorderly litter of garments, rugs, pillows, and blankets that had strewed the room before.

"Good!" he said heartily. "Now I want you to put on your warm things and come on the bridge with me. We're just passing the cape, and it's a sight worth watching this time of year."

Without a word she wrapped herself warmly and followed him to the little bridge, where the mate was already installed behind a frozen canvas shelter, peering steadily out at the racing seas that were bearing the Moscow steadily in toward the great, snow-crested cape.

"We're going into the Ohkotsk Sea," Macbeth explained briefly. "That island on the port side is the first of the Kuriles. We'll get behind it presently."

When opportunity presented, Aurora questioned the mate, and he told her placidly that the crew had given up all notion of the outside port.

"Ye see, missus," he explained, "Captain Macbeth, he runs this country up here. Them fellows down there didn't *know* him. But I dunno, somehow, just as soon as one gets above fifty north, why, Captain Macbeth has his own way. The crew, they *know* him now."

Aurora gazed at the ugly seas, felt the tremor of the vessel as it thrummed amid them, and then glanced at the figure of the captain.

All that was within her rose in revolt against him. He was a brute

among brutes, a savage amid barbarians, a monster capable of any excess when he "wanted" anything, as he put it.

His sure, insolent attitude at this moment made her clench her fists. And they *knew* him in this arctic desert, in this frozen and inaccessible part of the world.

Men dropped their eyes before his gaze and their voices when he spoke. Her hatred of him fairly consumed her. She fingered her revolver.

If Ronald Macbeth suspected anything of her feelings he gave no sign. He steadily conned the careening steamer along, careless of the thudding seas or the ice gathering again over everything. And when he had passed the strait and opened the sea beyond he merely gave the mate the course and tucked Aurora under his arm.

Though she had kept her anger hot during the two hours of the swift passage, she could not resist his authority. Once in the cabin she leaned against the bulkhead and waited till he noisily threw aside his outside garments.

Then she heard his voice saying, "Strip those furs off, Aurora, and get rid of those wraps. The cabin's hot." And in rage she obeyed him.

Across the supper table he watched her unobserved for a moment before he said bruskly: "I wish you would eat more. If you don't do better than this you'll reach New York next fall like a skeleton. You've *got* to eat up north."

"I wish it were to-night that I was to be back," she burst out.

"I know that," he said quietly. "I was afraid of your ignorance. You see, you didn't know anything. But you'll learn. In fact"—he smiled grimly at her—"you've *got* to learn. Learn or die in this country."

Her great azure eyes filled stormily. "I'd like to die!"

"You won't, however," he said with utter finality. "You know I promised to return you!"

"You promised!" she said bitterly.

He crumbled a hard biscuit in his calloused fingers and said slowly: "I promised. And have I ever broken a single promise I made to you?"

"No," she said huskily. "It was, as you say, my ignorance."

"You mean you didn't understand the hardships?" he inquired gently.

"I didn't understand how deeply one can come to hate a man," she returned superbly.

"I'm sorry," he said simply, and looked up to greet Rossiter, who entered briskly to report.

"We've rounded to, sir. Kumshu is six miles in. Lights in the station, captain!"

"Good! We'll go in at daylight. Stand on and off and tell the second mate to give the watch a double allowance of liquor."

The mate vanished and Macbeth rose from the table. "I think you will like it better ashore," he said in a tone oddly humble. "You'll find the station very comfortable, I think."

She looked at him with a slight smile on her face. "I expect I shall manage very well. Shall I have to see you as often?"

"No. I'll be busy. Like as not I'll have to drop down to Iturup, the big island. At any rate, I'll spare you as much as I can.

"Only—you understand—you are my wife to these people. I'll expect you to do your best."

CHAPTER VI.

At the Station.

TO her astonishment he appeared the next morning clean shaven, richly dressed, and altogether a different looking man than the one she had become used to during the tedious trip north. In answer to her involuntarily expression of surprise he smiled.

"Two reasons: First, I'm somebody up here, Aurora; next place, I'm supposed to be a newly married man. Just

leave everything to the men. They'll see to your stuff. Come ahead!"

The Moscow had been brought to anchor within a quarter of a mile of the shore, and almost directly under a high peak which Macbeth explained was a volcano. The sea was very smooth, and the passage to the bleak shore occupied but a few minutes.

As they approached, Aurora saw that there was a little group waiting for them—a little group of fur-clad people who looked very grotesque against the white snow.

"That's my outfit," Macbeth told her briefly. "Come on!"

For the first moment that her feet rested on the firm earth she felt dizzy. She realized that Ronald was supporting her.

Then, without a word, he bore her forward, and she realized that the little group was bowing profoundly to her. Macbeth was speaking curtly in a tongue she had never heard before.

At the end of his short speech the oldest man, a mild-looking little fellow with a queer, stringy, white beard, stepped up and kissed her fingers, followed by the rest.

This ceremony ended, Macbeth spoke bruskly again and the group scattered.

"Come on, Aurora. Old Papa Ivan says my message sent by cable via Vladivostok only reached here a week ago when the furs from Iturup came up. So we'll have to take pot-luck till I can get things straightened out."

But once within the heavily timbered station Aurora gasped. Barbaric it was in all its appointments; but her trained eyes saw that it was also a place of marvelous comfort.

Rugs, tapestries, furs, and mahogany had been used lavishly. A huge fire burned in a stone fireplace. On every hand were soft couches, great lamps, and braziers filled with scented woods. She breathed in the heavy odors and then turned to Macbeth.

"Yes," he said briefly, "it's all yours. It's too Oriental, of course; but one has to do with what one can get."

He clapped his hands and a dwarfed woman appeared, bowing. "Your maid," he said gently. "Your rooms are just off this one. I'll share this big room with you sometimes, but my quarters will be in the other building. Now I'll leave you."

He stooped and kissed her fingers, bowed again stiffly and went out.

A month later he came in for his usual half hour in the evening. He saluted her, asked his invariable question as to her comfort, and sat down, as she thought, for his silent vigil.

He had explained to her that it was necessary for many reasons that she admit him to her companionship for this brief term. And in her pride she had steadily refused to make any advances toward intimate conversation.

To-night she noticed that he seemed graver than usual.

"Is anything wrong?" she inquired, seating herself against a bearskin.

Macbeth lit a cigarette and sat down. "I am sorry to say there is," he responded. "In fact, I am worried. You know I sent Rossiter down to Hakodate with the steamer for the winter.

"Now I hear that one of my schooners has been wrecked on an uninhabited island two hundred miles south of here. I must get my crew off her—if they are alive."

"How? Isn't it impossible?"

"No," he said shortly. "It's part of my work. An islander brought up word."

"Then you will go?" she asked, allowing her slim hands to caress the fur about her.

"Yes. But I can't leave you here."

"Why not?" she demanded.

"Because I might not be able to get back here before next summer. I have to take an old brig that's laid up here, and when I get my men I'll simply have to go on down the sea and make for Hakodate."

He stared moodily into the fire. "If

I find my men I'll be a month gone. Another month making any of the southerly ports. March, that means. Then the trip back when the ice breaks up and it'll be June. I simply can't leave you here that long alone."

She leaned forward in her chair and he winced as he saw how beautiful she was. How her creamy cheeks were flushed and her azure eyes dark with anger.

"Will you tell me why you insist on going after an evidently useless lot of men and forcing me to undergo more hardships? If the men are alive, they can stay alive. If they are dead—and you have no means of knowing they are not—what is the use?"

"The use?" he repeated slowly. She saw an answering anger rise in his eyes. "Because they are my men. Because I'm Macbeth of the north; because they trust me. Do you suppose when they lost that schooner they didn't say to each other, 'Macbeth will find us'?"

"You paid them to take the risk," she said coldly.

"That doctrine is for those of us who are big enough," he responded harshly. "I understand that *I* must live up to that. And I do. Nobody has ever had to realize more fully than myself that when I'm paid, that ends it. There is neither friend nor help when *I'm* in need.

"But I'm the law and the lord in this north. Let 'em pray to their God in New York and London and among your crowd. But here it's Macbeth of Lopatka they pray to."

He rose, and she felt the tremendous pride of the man welling in his tones. "Yes, they pray to me, and I answer prayer."

"You are profane!" she said with an attempt at scorn.

"Profane!" He clapped his hands and Aurora's maid appeared. "Tushka," he said slowly, "the schooner is wrecked. Your husband lives on the shore without fire, eating fish."

Into the woman's face came a great fear. She dropped her chin on her flat breast. Her fingers twined together in slow agony.

"Well?" said Macbeth curtly.

The native listened to the wind mourning outside and her eyes flickered on the fire. Then she threw herself on her face at his feet.

"Enough!" he said bruskly. "He shall come back when the ice breaks up. I will go to him."

"And not die?" she quavered.

"He shall live."

Aurora watched the woman rise and go away stolidly. She saw that she was satisfied, and she turned to see what there was in the man before her that could so suddenly heal a breaking heart. For the first time in many long days she studied him, from the austere, firm face to the competent hands that hung motionless by his sides.

She, too, heard the wailing of the wind without, the far shriek of the storm across the island's rocky crest, the dull sound of the ice cakes grinding on the beach. Two things she knew in the profundity of her heart: that she had never hated the man as she hated him at this moment, and that she would go with him gladly.

"When do we start?" she asked.

"To-morrow morning. I've got the old brig ready, and provisions aboard for six months. All you have to do is to bring plenty of good boots, furs, and whatever things you actually will need. No furbelows. We can buy them in Japan."

She looked at him with lifted brows. "I suppose the vessel will be very uncomfortable?"

"Very," he returned shortly. "We take only six men. It'll be a hard trip. Good night!"

CHAPTER VII.

Macbeth Keeps His Word.

FOR forty-eight hours the nameless brig had thrashed her sodden way down the sea while Macbeth grimly

kept the wheel and directed the efforts of his silent crew.

All that time Aurora huddled in the filthy cabin, listening to the thunder of the short seas, the creaking of the wooden frame, and the tramp of stumbling feet overhead.

She knew that it was only by the most terrific endeavors that the wretched ship was kept to her work. She also knew, though not a word had been said about it, that no one but Macbeth would ever have attempted in mid-winter to find a wreck and save its crew on a coast of such evil repute.

Her feet were cold and she was chilled to the marrow by the icy dampness that oozed up from the foul hold. Occasionally she drank the hot tea that one of the crew brought her in a tin pot.

She had just dimly realized that another had broken when Macbeth came down and said curtly: "I've found the wreck. Come up with me."

She managed to creep up the worn steps to the little quarterdeck and thence to the slight shelter of the wooden wheel-box. While Macbeth steadied her on the sleety deck she followed the direction of his outstretched arm and peered at the low coast toward which the brig was making under plain sail. A single mast stood up out of the surf-swept ice that made out from the shore.

"Where are they?" she asked dully.

"Somewhere," he responded gruffly. "Now I want you to stay right here by me."

"You can't land there!" she cried suddenly.

"Right you are! But I'll show you how Macbeth of the north does things. Just stand beside me and I'll look out for you."

He shouted to the four men huddled under the break of the little forecastle and took the wheel himself. She felt the bite of the sleet against her neck and drew her muffler closer.

For the next twenty minutes she was speechless, knowing that she was witnessing a hand-to-hand grapple with death.

The low coast was broken in two places by small, rounded promontories covered here and there with snow. Just inside one of these stood the single mast that marked the wreck.

The small bight between them was filled with jagged ice, heaped in grotesque crags. The surf ran up among these as among rocks. Beyond this ice she saw a smooth slope rising toward a low, veiled peak.

On every side of the laboring brig great cakes of ice crunched and growled and battered like huge hammers. The little crew were gathered aft, their pinched, flat faces set on the inaccessible shore.

Driven by the northerly gale the brig smashed its way inward until Aurora could see plainly the surf, the tumbling ice cakes, the grinding floes that nosed the promontories.

She could not understand what Macbeth was doing. All she knew was that a few more moments, any moment, would see the vessel crushed and sunk in the maelstrom.

But he seemed oblivious to this, his arms steadily thrusting the clumsy wheel now this way, now that. Once in a while she glanced up at the straining canvas, drumming in the wind. Then she was thrown from her feet as the brig rose and struck its bows heavily on a floe.

She scrambled up. Macbeth was grimly at the wheel. She felt the whole fabric beneath them quiver and throb and then she knew no more except that a strong arm was around her and a stern voice crying orders past her ear.

A dash of water so cold that it scalded her flesh went over her. She felt the deck tilt, heard the crash of a cracking spar, the slatting of canvas, the shriek of a rope parting, the roar of water about her.

She was lifted to her feet and she heard Macbeth saying hoarsely: "We made it, my girl. Safe and sound. Look around you?"

She opened her eyes and saw the leaning stump of the mainmast, a cake of ice, slipping slowly down the broken deck. But movement had ceased. Just ahead of them the ice stretched firmly to the rocky shore.

She peered fearfully seaward. A jumble of ice cakes churned in the surf, whose spray sang in the wind.

"You've wrecked the ship!" she cried desperately.

"Yes," he answered. "I was afraid I might have to. But we've found the crew and we've six months' provisions in the hold. Now stand up. I have work to do."

Holding to the wheel she dully watched him chopping swiftly at a frozen hatch. Then she saw him drive two men down the gaping hole. A moment later a box was thrust up, followed by a keg, by other boxes and kegs, which slipped and slid down the tilted deck and brought up against the bulwarks.

How long she stood in the biting gale while this was going on she did not know. Suddenly Macbeth appeared, his face streaming with sweat.

"We've got the stuff all right," he told her. "The men will bring it ashore. Come with me."

For an endless period she was lifted over toppling ice cakes, dropped down steep declivities, thrust violently up ridges that seemed to cut through her heavy boots. At last she felt the round stones of the shore under foot.

"We are in time," said the voice in her ear. "Just in time."

Appeared dark, grimy figures before her, barking hoarse words, kissing her hands. Then the acrid smoke of a fire stung her eyes and she felt herself being settled down in an evil-smelling fur. Somebody scalded her frozen lips with hot tea and she lost consciousness.

When she came to herself she was inside a dark shelter. A lamp without a chimney guttered and smoked in the gloom. Voices sounded around her. She saw a face bent over her.

"Where am I?" she asked.

"In the tent," said the face. "We've got all the stuff off the poor old brig and we'll soon have a better place fixed for you. Go to sleep."

In spite of hunger and thirst she did so. When she awoke it was daylight. Macbeth sat over a small fire cooking something in a saucepan.

"I'm terribly hungry," she said, stretching her limbs luxuriously.

"Good!" he said quickly. "Sit up and have something."

She was astonished to feel her strength flow back quickly into her cramped members. She ate slowly of the boiled meat and drank the broth he offered her in a tin cup.

"The ship is wrecked!" she said suddenly, remembering.

"Yes. But nobody is hurt."

But—but how are we going to get away?" she demanded.

"Sleep some more. Nobody will be in here. I have some work to do," he responded. "When you feel better we'll talk it over."

She looked at him with a spasm of hatred. But the warmth and her own weariness overcame her, though she fought against them. She slept again.

This time he shook her into wakefulness.

"We'll have some more to eat," he told her. "Then you'd better clean up. We can talk things over now."

"What time is it?" she demanded.

"Noon. Bad weather, too. But I've heated some water for you and got your things out of the cabin and dried them."

She sat up and her hair fell about her face. She was conscious of blushing furiously. "Please leave me!" she pleaded.

For an hour she tried to make a fitting toilet. She discovered to her disgust that her face was covered with grease, that her hands were full of it, that it was in her hair.

She opened her traveling bag to find a mirror and was suddenly stricken with numb shame. Evidently everything in it, even to her lingerie, had

been drenched. Rough hands had attempted to dry each article.

Hot tears ran down her cheeks. Her last barriers had been battered down. She knelt and sobbed while the heavy texture of the tent swayed in the wind and the moisture that had gathered on its inner surface dripped down upon her.

When she managed to collect herself she finished her toilet and drew the tent-flap aside.

She stepped out into a desolate scene.

Before her the little bay presented an aspect of mingled rocks and ice. In the immediate foreground a second low tent had been erected beside a small, frozen creek. In front of this were piled many boxes and kegs.

Ronald Macbeth was striding up and down before these, a pipe in his mouth and his face blazing from the frost.

She caught the look of startled admiration on his face as he saw her. Somehow that expression soothed her. It gave her a sense of still having power, of not having lost her prerogatives.

"I didn't expect you could make yourself so presentable," he said awkwardly. "You see, I had to rub your face and hands with grease when I got you in to save you from frost-bite."

"So I found out," she answered. "And now how are you going to get us out of here?"

"There is only one way," he said promptly. "I don't know whether you will agree to it. That is to make it on foot to the southerly end of this island, about forty miles, where we will have to cross to the next island on the ice.

"Forty miles beyond the little strait there is another station, where there is a steam schooner laid up. There's no one there at all. But we can be much more comfortable than here, and there's plenty of stores on the ship, too. The only trouble is, we should have to make the trip by ourselves."

"You mean—"

"That you would have to stand my exclusive society for at least three months."

"But the men here—why won't you take them along?"

He shook his head. "It's out of the question. First place, there is forty thousand dollars' worth of furs stored here, saved from the wrecked schooner. Next place, all these men must stay here to raise the schooner, which the skipper says he can do in the spring.

"Third place, it's part of my agreement with the Japanese government that none of my crews shall winter on that particular island. They'll take my explanation about us two, but they would rightly consider me an outlaw if I took my hunters along. See?"

"And if I refuse to go?"

He tossed his hand out toward the wind-shaken tent. "We'll stay here."

"But we can't!" she said desperately.

"Then we'll go," he said, evidently relieved. "We'll fix things up and start to-morrow, if the weather looks good. We can make the steamer's winter quarters in five days if all goes well."

She gazed at the forbidding landscape and shuddered. "How do we go?" she asked faintly.

"We walk it," he replied, stepping quickly to her. "Aurora, you're worn out! You must be strong!"

"Don't touch me!" she remonstrated weakly. "I—I hate you!"

CHAPTER VIII.

Macbeth Tells of Himself.

HE escorted her back to the tent and she heard him lace the flap down from the outside. In the fetid warmth and darkness she made her way to the couch of furs and snuggled herself down among them.

But before she could forget herself in sleep Ronald came in and proceeded to cook her another meat stew. She ate it in silence. When she was done he said apologetically, "I will stay here a little while, if you don't mind, and smoke."

She nodded acquiescence and after a while he went on to say, "These people are primitive, you know. I couldn't explain to them why I didn't stay in my own tent."

"There is no reason," she said sharply. "I understand perfectly."

"Then if you don't mind I'll just doze here and keep the fire going," he said gravely. "It will save my face, as they put it."

She stirred uneasily. "I wish you would tell me exactly why you wrecked that brig," she inquired.

He smoked thoughtfully for a while before answering. "Well, when I started out I thought from what the native told me that the wreck was in a bay to the north of this. We could have landed there.

"But you see, I knew those poor fellows were starving and freezing to death and I had to take chances. My only chance was to put the old packet ashore so that we could still save the grub and the other things. The ship didn't amount to anything."

"But we were nearly killed!"

"Yes," he said calmly.

She raised herself on one elbow and angrily demanded: "Are you honestly never afraid, or is that just a pose? Don't you care?"

"Oh, I'm afraid," he replied. "And I care. But you see, when a man wants something, he's got to go for it the best way he can."

In the darkness and warmth she felt the intimacy of the hour. Hate this man as she did, yet she was curious to know what he thought, the secret springs of his actions, the motives that moved him.

And then she realized, as one thinks of something long out of mind, that she had married him, in a church, with a priest repeating the solemn words of the ceremony before them. His ring was on her finger.

Now that they shared a trembling tent on the barren coast of an uninhabited island during a winter's stormy evening, why shouldn't she allow him to speak of himself? The opportunity might never come again.

"And you always go for what you want?" she demanded.

"Yes," he said simply.

"And get it?"

"No."

"How odd!" she said mockingly. "What did you never get that you wanted?"

He was silent a little. When he spoke she understood that he was trying to put his thoughts into exact words.

"I think the first thing I wanted was not to be lonely. I didn't want to have to fight all my battles alone. I wanted to be able once in a while to quit and have some other fellow pitch in and do things for me.

"I didn't get it. I discovered that nobody really cared about me except myself.

"The next thing I found out was that if I had to have something I must get it for myself. It was no good getting soured on the world, because that was the way things were run. I just made up my mind that I'd have what I had to have and that what I didn't want I'd do without.

"It's queer how many things you can do without—just as queer as it is what things you can't do without."

"What special things did you find you could do without?" she asked sharply, interested in spite of herself.

"Well, little things: flowers on the table, finger-bowls, a man to hold your overcoat, a man to open the door of your carriage."

"You scorn them?"

"Certainly not!" he returned promptly. "Lots of people have to have them. Men like that Willie Harrison, for instance, that railroad president in New York. Now he'd be lost without a man to hold his coat."

"All little things," she said contemptuously. "But they are worth worth while in the aggregate."

"Not when you have to pay more than they're worth to you," he re-

joined. "When you come down to it, you can't afford a single thing that you can do without, any more than you can afford not have anything that you really want."

"And what do you call things one has to have?"

"Well, there's several," he suggested. "I guess being one's own man and master is one of mine. I've got to be free. I've got to be the boss. That's it. If you told me I must do something, right there you and I'd fall out."

"But you told me yourself that you must come down about this wreck."

"That was my own 'must,'" he said quietly.

"And is there anything else you want very badly?" she continued.

"Not that I don't expect to get," he said curtly. "Now for a doze."

Aurora fingered the revolver hidden in her bosom and had vague thoughts of having some time to use it. She fell asleep before the long night had fairly begun, while Ronald Macbeth sat broad awake planning the trip ahead of them and trying to foresee every disaster that inexorable winter holds in store for those who live along the northern seas.

He was stirring in the earliest dawn, busy over sledge, provisions, fuel, and all the many things that the arctic traveler must consider. The sun was barely up when he awakened Aurora and gave her forty minutes in which to be ready for the start.

The sterile shore line stretched infinitely ahead of them as the brief day darkened and Macbeth came to a stiff halt in the lee of a small bluff.

"We'll camp here to-night," he told Aurora. "The worst is over. This time to-morrow we'll have reached the steam schooner."

She nodded and set about her evening task of getting out sleeping bags and food while her companion put up their little shelter tent and heated water.

All day neither had spoken. Macbeth had been husbanding his strength for the final day. He felt strangely weak and, for the first time in his life, he was doubtful of his own success.

It was possible that the steam schooner had not been laid up in her usual winter headquarters. In that case their plight was desperate.

"But Kujiro never failed me yet," he kept repeating to himself. "I told him to put the ship there. He must have done it."

And in spite of this he could not forbear to think of all the possibilities that meant if the faithful Japanese might have been unable to carry out his orders.

"It is going to storm again," Aurora said presently, standing and looking out at the glow in the western sky.

"It is moonlight to-night and we'll travel on," Macbeth replied moodily. "We can make another ten miles. After that the trail runs through the woods and we'll be sheltered."

"I feel much stronger than I did. Don't you think I look better?"

It was the first intimate word she had spoken during the four days since they had left the wreck and he turned quickly.

"Much better," he assented. "Do you know, I believe you belong in the north." His eyes swept her from fur cap to boots: "You are beautiful this afternoon."

Her eyes chilled him. "That may be true. I was merely informing you that I can travel all night if you think best."

"It would be best," he said thoughtfully staring at the pallid heavens. "That would bring us to the steamer in the forenoon. Where is the tea?"

She obediently handed him the little package and then, at another curt request, dug some frozen butter out of a sack.

To her surprise he held this last article in his hand for a moment and considered her, as if she had sent him a message by offering it to him.

"What is the matter?" she demanded sharply.

"Do you know that this butter came from New York?" he said gravely. "Here we are on a Kurile island, in the dead of winter, you and I, Macbeth of the north and Aurora, the beauty of New York City, and we are eating butter that was churned somewhere on Long Island. Isn't it funny? You and the butter!"

"I and the butter!" she repeated.

"Yes," he went on. "The butter and my wife! This is a strange world!"

"And I suppose you think of your wife and the butter in the same way," she said with icy bitterness.

"Sorry." he said placidly. "That is another thing you have to learn: keep your temper."

"I never lost it in my life," she returned. "My hating you doesn't mean I haven't control of my temper."

"That's what I meant—your hatred for me. You ought to reason it out. You ought to know by this time that when you've had your tea and stew you won't hate me."

CHAPTER IX.

Aurora Makes a Request.

SHE was silent. It seemed useless to deny the fact. She had proven it. A full meal and the drowsy warmth that followed seemed to wipe out the acrid emotions of the day.

But how did this strange man know it? She suddenly resolved that she would not eat. At any sacrifice she would keep that feeling clear and sharp.

It was all that was left her. Wealth, position, pleasure, the kind faces of friends, the obsequious respect of inferiors—that was gone. But she could still hate this taciturn, brutal man.

When she refused the food Macbeth did not smile. He merely put her portion aside and ate his own slowly and thoughtfully. Once in a while he glanced at her. Each time she met his eyes defiantly.

"I think that it was myself who was ignorant," he said presently. "I should not have said that, about what eating would do to you. I—I would have had more sense than to say such a thing to any of my men—to any one but you. A man is always a fool to tell what he knows."

"Why did you tell me?" she demanded.

"Because I thought of you as an equal," he responded. "I spoke as I would to myself. Often I say to myself, when things go wrong inside of me, 'It will be all right when you have eaten.' That's reasonable. It's the way for a man to argue with himself.

"It's a fact, one of the great facts that make some men masters and others slaves.

"I remember once—when I was very young—I used that fact to save my own life. It was on this very island. My crew mutinied. They would have killed me. But I fed 'em and they forgot."

"I see your point," she said in a low voice. "Give me the dish."

He said no more till she had finished. Then he lit a pipe and offered her a cigarette. "It will help you," he suggested. "And I want to ask you a question."

"What is it?"

"You've been my wife for several months. I've treated you as an equal. That was my bargain. But part of my bargain was that I would look after you. I'm in doubt. By merely making you do what I say I can look after you. But—I am feeling very much as if I'd like to talk to you as I would myself. Maybe I'm lonely."

He stared up at the veiled stars a moment and she saw the austere firmness of his lips.

"Yes, that's it. I'm alone. I learned the lesson long ago. But somewhere there must be some one—one person in this world—with whom I can be myself. Now I'm Macbeth of Lopatka. On all these seas and along these shores I'm the one they pray to. God must be very lonely."

Her heart began to beat faster. Her face flushed in the cold dusk. He could not discern the swift flaming of her eyes. "I understand!" she said breathlessly. "I understand!"

"You ought to," he went on, still quietly. "You were lonely yourself when I met you."

She leaned forward. "Ah, then you knew it? I will be reasonable. Treat me as your equal."

He said nothing for the moment. When he spoke it was with a new tone in his voice. "I'll do it. To-morrow—to-morrow—" He hesitated.

"What—what happens to-morrow?" she insisted.

"The steam schooner may not be there," he returned soberly. "You see I told Kujiro two years ago always to lay her up in that place. Did he do it?"

"If he didn't?"

"If he didn't—well, Aurora, we'll have to make it to Kunasheer."

"Is it possible?"

"A question I've been asking myself," he continued.

"I see."

"Are you afraid?" he questioned her presently, diffidently.

"No."

"Well, at any rate you will have proved yourself—if we fail." His voice rang triumphantly out into the desolation. "You'll know that Macbeth of Lopatka knew what you could do. And that's all that matters!"

The tremendous egotism of the man was a stimulant. It did not strike her as ludicrous that she should gladly perish in a wilderness with only one man to know the struggle she had made.

There would be nothing in the New York papers; none of her people would know of those last heroic hours; she would simply die, with the voice of Macbeth of Lopatka in her ears.

Of course, she keenly realized that this was a strange point of view. But, after all, it was a just one. It was the lesson of existence; to survive and to die to one's self. It satisfied her own egotism.

She looked at her companion with a new interest. They were equals. She rose to her feet and turned her face southward.

"Let's be getting on," she said in her clear voice.

They traveled light. Ronald packed on his back their food and fuel and a single sleeping bag. "The rest we sha'n't need," he said grimly.

She followed him on the trail that led just above the icy shore line, and behind them the fading aurora borealis glowed and whimpered, now casting their shadows before them; now darkening till she could barely see the steady, pistonlike movement of his legs. Far ahead a dim star shone to guide them.

It was ten o'clock when they skirted a little headland and came to a long stretch of woods that fledged the lower benches of land. Macbeth halted and lit a cigarette.

"Fuel," he said briefly. "That's why I always laid the steam schooner up near here."

"How much farther is it?" she asked.

"Sixteen miles. We'll have to travel slowly, for both the moon that's rising and the northern lights that are fading will soon be hidden by the clouds. When you are tired, say so; we'll make camp."

"I sha'n't be tired," she answered.

"We'll walk together a while. By the way, something curious came into my mind a while ago. Who were your people?"

"I might ask you that question, too," she answered. "Mine were pioneers and soldiers. Father's father was a lumberman and mother's family were all army people."

"I was wondering about it," he rejoined. "You see, one's blood tells a lot. Of course, plenty of men with good blood in 'em don't amount to anything. But somewhere when you meet a real man, you know that some-

where back in his race there've been others like him.

"My father was a whaling captain. He and my mother were lost somewhere in this Okhotsk Sea twenty years ago, while I was a boy in school."

"Lost?" she repeated gently.

"Yes. Ship never heard from. Not that that matters. I know they did their best. But it made it hard for me. I had nobody to look to. It took a long time for me to learn that people weren't interested in me. They wanted me to show them something."

"But you don't!" she protested. "If—if father had known who you were, he'd never have done what he did."

"Quite right," Macbeth answered calmly. "But the circumstances were unusual. You and I understood 'em. But I couldn't have explained—and it wasn't worth while. Of course, under ordinary conditions, I'd have told your father and mother—proved it to 'em."

Her tone was sharp. "Under what circumstances?"

"Well, if I'd fallen in love with you and had to court you and all that. It's the rule of that game to prove who you are and all about yourself. But I didn't see any use this time."

In spite of all she could do her voice trembled. "You mean you didn't want me, as you vulgarly put it."

"Well," he said thoughtfully, "the circumstances are different, aren't they? I haven't really got a wife and you haven't really got a husband."

"But I cost you fifty thousand dollars!" she protested. "Why did you agree to spend that? You say you got nothing in return!"

"I didn't say that," he remonstrated. "If I was ready to put up the money and marry you, on a purely partnership basis, that was my affair, wasn't it?"

She stopped and he saw the flash of her eyes on his. "Why did you do it?"

"When the year of the agreement is up I'll tell you," he responded. With this she must perforce be satisfied, for he gradually quickened the pace and she fell behind where the going was easier.

CHAPTER X.

The Steamer at Last.

DAWN came slowly, with blustery squalls of sleet and the cloud wrack overhead slowly yielding to the stream of the gale that was beginning to pour out of the east.

They were barely stumbling along, Macbeth half carrying, half dragging Aurora onward. Now and then he bent his head down and shouted in her ear: "Keep going! We'll soon be there!" and she would stiffen up for the moment and cry back in a husky whisper: "Do you see the ship?"

Though he had marked already the low peak below which was the harbor, and though he had strained his sharp eyes to their utmost, Ronald Macbeth had caught no glimpse of the masts that would be a token that they were to save themselves. He was desperate and it showed in the strength with which he bore his burden. At times she winced as he forced her through the low bushes set deep in the frozen snow, and once she screamed. That involuntary cry brought the blood to Macbeth's face so that it bled where the sharp sleet had pricked it.

When he suddenly saw the object of his search he stopped. Kujiro had obeyed orders.

The mere halting awakened Aurora. She called out sharply: "Do you see it?"

"I do. Right below us. Kujiro did as I ordered him."

"Now I'm all right," she said, shaking herself. "I was very tired. I got to thinking what would happen if we didn't find the steamer."

"Bad business," he said huskily. "Now come on! We've got to find fuel, fire, and food."

They reached the black side of the steamer and Macbeth shrewdly sur-

veyed its position in the ice. Then he lifted Aurora up and followed her to the deeply drifted deck.

A moment later he had smashed the ice from a doorway and pried the door open. A single glance satisfied him.

Again he said: "Kujiro did exactly what I told him."

He picked up a lantern that sat inside the alleyway and fumbled for matches. The wick melted and flamed up slowly. Macbeth shut the door and led the way inward.

It took an hour for him to get a good coal fire going in the galley stove and the water boiling. Aurora watched the proceedings listlessly, her pallid face scarred with little scratches where the sleet had marked it. She drank the hot tea in gulps.

"You must get off your frozen clothes and put on dry ones," Macbeth said sharply. "I'll rummage for clothes and bring them in here. When you are dressed again I'll fix something to eat."

"I'm too tired to dress and I'm all right," she complained.

"You are not," he said sternly, and left to return presently with heavy flannel shirts, stiff trousers, and felted boots. "Put these on, Aurora."

She looked at them sleepily. "I sha'n't."

"If you go to sleep I'll simply have to undress you and put them on you myself," he returned. "I know how you feel. But you must do this. It means life or death to you."

Slowly her eyes blazed. "I have my revolver!"

"Nonsense!" he said sharply. "Don't drink any more tea or even nibble a biscuit till you've changed. I give you ten minutes." He slammed the door and she heard him crunching aft toward the cabin.

When he returned she was reclad, rebellious, and indignant. "I can never wear such things!" she stormed.

"You can! Put on that fur cap. Come with me." He led the way down the alleyway and thrust open the cabin door. She saw a fire blazing in a little grate. A man sat before it, apparently asleep. But the room was chill beyond all belief.

"Who is he?" she asked, suddenly frightened.

"A man who died of his ignorance," he answered curtly. "Come and see!"

"Dead?" she whispered. "No! I can't look at him!"

He put one hand at her elbow and forced her to take the few steps to the fireside. She stared fearfully down at the figure in the chair. A waxen face looked up at her, its open eyes glazed with eternal frost.

"It's a fellow I had as mate," he explained. "I suppose he didn't fancy going away with Kujiro according to orders and sneaked back. He started the fire and didn't change his clothes. He fell asleep and—died."

"It is awful!" she moaned.

"It is," he assented, stirring up the fresh fire. "He disobeyed orders. That is what happens." He picked up the stiff figure and strode away with it. When he came back Aurora lay on the deck in a faint.

For an instant he stood as if stunned. Then he reached down and felt for her heart. Satisfied, he took her back into the galley and laid her on the cot that the cook had once occupied.

She revived quickly, but when she opened her eyes he saw that pure terror held her in its grasp. He jerked a bottle out of his pocket and poured a stiff drink between her teeth.

"I never knew that—that death was like that," she murmured presently, clinging to his arm. "You and I—"

"We might," he agreed. "But we didn't."

"How long was he—had he been there?" she quavered.

"A month, anyway," he answered. "Probably longer. I see he didn't have much time to break into the stores. He was a fool. He thought he could disobey me and get away with it."

That night he had the stuffy cabin thoroughly aired and warmed. "And

I can cook pretty well," he said cheerfully. "There's plenty of grub aboard and we'll do finely."

She glanced at him apprehensively. "I suppose I ought to be able to cook."

"You!" he laughed. "Never. Why should you?"

"But I am helpless."

"That is true," he said thoughtfully. "I'll teach you—if you really want to know how."

"We'll be here how long?" she demanded presently.

"Kujiro is due back here as soon as the spring comes—last of May."

"And—we shall see no one? Is there no chance of our getting away?"

"Not a chance," he answered quietly. "From now on it's just you and me. You will learn other things besides cooking, Aurora."

"What?" she asked bravely.

"To live with another person in peace and good temper. To be content with food and warmth. To watch the gales rise and fall, the seasons change, the stars alter, the world be born again.

"You'll learn to know that you are human and that New York is a myth, an artifice, a structure as transient and foolish as this sunrise carved on this Kurile island walrus tusk. Oh, you'll learn a lot.

"And when you go back to Fifth Avenue and your father's house and Willie Harrison and the head waiter in the Mazdah and the butler in your own dining-room you'll know just what it all is."

She leaned forward with a swift motion that threw into relief the lovely contours of her face and throat. "Do you know, Ronald, what New York was built for? Do you know why men made that city and lavished money on it and seized continents to enrich it? You know a great deal, but you don't know that. And I do!"

He stared, holding a heavy piece of salted beef on a fork before him. Then he flushed. "Why? For whom? If you know, tell me!"

"For women like myself," she laughed. "For youth and beauty and loveliness. Men have piled gold on gold and jewels on jewels—just for me."

She swept her hand round the stuffy cabin daintily. "This is where cities like New York are born, my dear Ronald. This is where men live and work—for me and mine.

"Would your furs be worth anything if it weren't for me? your jewels, your rugs, your ivories, your riches? Bah! You call yourself Macbeth of the North. And you starve and sweat and toil and die for me, so that I may have a rich garment, a flashing stone, a cup to drink out of, a shoe to keep my feet from the pavement. Pooh!"

She snapped her fingers and laughed again. Never had she been more beautiful nor alluring. "And you do all this for me and what do you get in return?"

She raised her splendid eyes to his. "What reward do you get? You freeze and die. You fool! Macbeth of the North!" She lilted to her feet and faced him mockingly.

"What do I give you? Nothing! Nothing!"

Very slowly he dropped the meat into the stew-pot and thrust it on the coals in the grate. Then he raised himself and thrust the fork into the rack that hung from the bulkhead.

"Yes," he said coldly. "New York was built for women like you. Fools built it. They built their city and gave you riches and jewels and furs and I—" He smiled faintly.

She matched his smile with one of supreme insolence. "And you?"

"I went into that city and took the woman the fools built it for," he said soberly.

Instantly she became immobile. The faint smile was still on her parted lips, the color eddied on her cheeks, her slender hands were still outstretched, the pink fingers curled like rose leaves.

But all motion and life was gone.

She looked at him, her azure eyes clouded, wide, imploring. Even her bosom was still.

So they looked at each other while the gale shrieked outside and the icy cradle of the steamer shivered to the impact of the surges far out. Slowly, as vapor fades from a mirror, the color left her cheeks. He saw the throbbing of an artery in her smooth neck.

"Yes," he repeated quietly, "I went into that city that was built for you and took you. I, Macbeth of the North, went into the greatest city of the world and took the most beautiful woman out of it—for mine."

Her arms sank to her sides. She still faced him gallantly.

But her voice was dull as she whispered, "For yours?"

"For mine," he said firmly.

She bowed her head slowly. He did not smile. "But now that you are mine I am going—to give you back to New York."

"Give me back?" she murmured, quivering before him.

"Yes," he said curtly.

With a superb effort she controlled her voice, even smiled at him. "I hope you will!"

But in the deeps of her eyes welled hate, the mortal and beautiful hatred of a woman conquered and scorned.

CHAPTER XI.

The Moscow Arrives.

IT was a blowy morning in late May when Ronald Macbeth dropped his hand from his eyes and called down to Aurora, "There comes the Moscow."

She emerged slowly from the cabin, clad in heavy trousers and a blue flannel shirt.

Ronald looked at her unobserved. She was more beautiful than ever.

Her glorious hair was coiled heavily about her small head, thrust through with ivory pins. The shirt, open at the neck, showed the firm white of her throat. Even her bare hands still showed no trace of hardship or neglect.

But he discerned the full development of a new dignity in her cold face. He muttered to himself.

"You say the Moscow is in sight?" she asked quietly.

He nodded and turned away.

"Then this is ended," she went on, indicating the cramped deck of the steam schooner with a scornful gesture.

He made no response.

Down in his own dark cabin he faced himself in the mirror. He saw his own austere visage, his own steady eyes. But he recognized that his expression, too, was changed.

For the moment he threw back his shoulders and confronted himself. Then he laughed softly, and returned to the deck, once more master of himself.

The steamer edged into the bay and finally swung alongside the schooner. Rossiter appeared, solicitous, voluble. Ronald listened to his report and nodded curtly after a single question.

"And the missus?" demanded Rossiter, taking off his cap awkwardly to Aurora.

"I'm all right," she replied calmly.

"Rossiter brought all your things from the station," Ronald put in. "So you had better move right over to your old quarters."

"Them clothes don't misbecome you, ma'am," said the mate admiringly.

Aurora smiled faintly. "They are quite uncomfortable. I shall be glad to get my own."

That evening Macbeth entered the lighted saloon of the Moscow, dressed in his best again. Aurora glanced at him and proceeded with the adjustment of a necklace.

"I believe dinner is ready," he said.

"May I inquire your plans?" she said when they were seated.

"I am going to carry out our agreement, as I have all along," he replied. "We sail for Yokohama to-morrow. I shall have a couple of weeks' busi-

ness there. Then we return to New York. I find that it will not be necessary for me to keep you the full year. We'll be back in September."

"That is very good news," she said.

"The business in Japan is about the furs," he went on, evidently trying to interest her.

"I supposed so."

"Everything is all right everywhere," he resumed. "Rossiter brought me all the reports. The schooner that was wrecked was floated again and Tushka—your maid—got her husband back last week."

"Another of your promises made good," she said lightly.

He frowned and stared at his plate. "I wish I could make you understand that I *always* do what I promise." He looked up at her. "It may help to make things—some things—plain to you, later."

"I don't know anything that needs to be made plainer than you have made everything," she retorted bitterly.

"You can't say that you haven't learned a lot," he went on, paying no attention to her tone. "The trouble with the whole affair was, as I see it now, that we were married—are married."

"Thank Heaven, it won't be long till we are free from each other!"

"You see, that made it hard," he pursued evenly. I'm glad we both kept to our bargain. It's all over." He smiled at her half humorously. "At any rate, you can say you know who Macbeth of the North is."

"Ah!" she breathed. "But I shall forget you!"

"Never," he said. "Never, not for a day, nor for an hour. You can't see the setting sun, nor hear the wind, nor smell salt water, or touch a fur, but what you must think of me. And when any one says 'North' to you, you will say to yourself, 'Macbeth was my husband.'"

"That sha'n't be true!" she cried, her blue eyes lit with anger. "I'll forget you!"

His own eyes clouded. "Try it," he rejoined a little roughly. "You'll find that you may forget kisses and whispered names and lips soft in the dusk. But you'll never forget me. And I—" He stopped.

"And you?" she said, laughing mockingly. "Shall you forget?"

Suddenly his manner changed, to her amazement. He answered her mockery as lightly as she offered it.

"I? Surely you wouldn't expect even a husband to be so impolite."

She dropped her rounded elbows on the cloth and cupped her chin in her palms. Her eyes shone.

"A husband? What a funny husband! The worst of the joke is, I never can tell it. But I shall enjoy it—by myself. I'll laugh—if I do think of you. Don't you see the joke of it?"

Their forced laughter rang out in the little saloon. Mr. Roisster, busily engaged in writing up his log, put down his spectacles and nodded to the chief engineer.

"The spirits of that gell are amazing," he rumbled. "Listen to the cap'n and her! Now, where do you suppose he picked up such a looker?"

"I dunno," said the chief. "But Macbeth always did get what he wanted."

"Yes," said the mate, painfully entering another figure. "The cap'n always did get what he went after. And I'll bet she knows she's got some man, too. I told her last year that she *didn't* know him. B' this time she must know him pretty well, eh?"

Again the light laughter pealed out from the closed saloon and the two old seamen nodded to each other over their pipes.

CHAPTER XII.

Plans for the Future.

THE Chicago express stood under the train-shed on Oakland Mole, ready to pull out for the East.

Ronald Macbeth settled Aurora in her stateroom and glanced around. "I think you will be all right," he said gravely. "Shall I see you at breakfast?"

"It would be too bad to miss one when we have only four more together. Don't you think so?" she asked coldly.

"Then I'll call at half past eight," he murmured.

In the crowded library car Macbeth lit a cigar and proceeded to look over a small packet of papers which he took out of his pocket. When he had examined them all he sighed and put them away.

Then he tossed his half-finished cigar into the receiver and strode back to his own Pullman. The porter waited round his berth expectantly, but Macbeth paid no attention to him. Half an hour later he was sound asleep.

At breakfast the next morning he asked Aurora how she had slept, and went on to inquire whether she had succeeded in buying everything she needed in San Francisco.

"Yes," she replied. "By the way, if you will come into my room this forenoon I'll have something to say." She smiled at him and he flushed.

"You see," she went on, "we've so little time to settle up our affairs as a married couple."

"This is Wednesday," he admitted. "We'll reach New York Sunday morning. We'll have to wait till Monday before we get things in shape to—to leave."

When he knocked and was admitted to her stateroom she motioned him to a chair, seating herself on the lounge.

"It's rather embarrassing," she said frankly; "but I must square myself up with you. There's no need of going over the terms of our agreement?"

"Not the slightest," he said, with a grim smile. "It's fulfilled and done with."

She fingered the skirt of her morning gown and sighed. "I owe you some money, I'm afraid. You know you gave me fifty thousand when we started out."

"That was the amount," he murmured. "However, that was yours. You can't owe me any of that, you know."

"I have forty thousand of it left," she went on more composedly. "I should prefer that you take it."

'Certainly not," he protested. "Aurora, I wish you wouldn't feel this way."

"I have a very special reason," she said, flushing slightly. "You see—I have been your wife—legally and in other people's eyes—for some time. When I get a divorce I—I intend to ask for alimony."

"For alimony?" he repeated, startled.

"Yes. You may be unable to appreciate it, my dear sir, but I have a certain amount of pride. I shall not ask my father for a cent. Of course, he will probably give me all I want. But my pride is concerned in this.

"I want you to take this forty thousand dollars now and then give it to me through the courts, so that people—the people I care for—won't say you are a beggar and couldn't support me. Do you see?"

Ronald stared out of the window at the mountains for some time before he replied. Finally he turned to her with a brief, "All right. I understand the first application for a divorce includes a plea for an allowance and counsel fees. Make that forty thousand and I'll give this back to you."

She looked at him curiously as he folded up the bank-draft she had bought in Yokohama the year before. "You'd better see whether it is for the right amount," she remarked. "And I haven't indorsed it, either."

He mechanically opened the big yellow paper. Instantly his brows came together. "This is made out to me personally."

"Last year," she added.

He looked up quickly. "I—I—may I ask what you did that for?"

She smiled, and he thought he caught

a hint of sadness about her mouth. "I —I burned my bridges behind me," she murmured. "I was afraid I might take the money and run away from you!"

"I suppose I'll have to be satisfied with that explanation, but I confess—asking your pardon—that I don't believe it."

"Well, no matter," she said hastily. "Now the other things I have I will return to you on Monday."

"What other things? Can't I buy my wife things? This is where *my* pride must be considered."

"I don't refer to the clothes and things. I mean my engagement-ring—the one you gave me that afternoon at the Mazdah—and the—the wedding-ring."

"Anything else?" he said dully.

"I think I'll keep everything else but one article," she said carelessly. "I'll give that back to you Monday."

"Have I anything of yours that I ought to return?" he demanded.

"Nothing, I believe," she answered calmly. "And now that we have arranged our marriage matter, sha'n't we agree to drop it till we arrive? I'm rather tired of it all."

"Of course, you understand that I won't contest your suit," he said abruptly. "Let's drop the matter with a thorough understanding. You are to sue me for divorce on the grounds of desertion or cruelty, or whatever the lawyers agree upon. The single thing that I'll fight is any accusation that I have been unfaithful to you."

"That," she said flushing, "is a needless reminder. I—I hope I haven't seriously crippled you financially?"

"No," he said hastily.

"You know I think that fifty thousand dollars and a year's misery was a high price to pay for—for—"

"For what?" he asked.

She smiled again, fully and splendidly. "For the hatred of a woman."

For the first time since she had known him he flinched. She saw the blood ebb from his bronzed face and lines of pain gather about his eyes. He rose quietly, bowed, and went out.

A little later the obsequious porter brought her a note. "The gentleman in the next car—your gentleman friend—told me to give this to you," he explained.

She took the folded paper and reached for her purse.

"No, ma'am," said the negro respectfully. "The gentleman hisself gave me five dollahs. Thank you, ma'am."

She opened the note. It read, in the neat, full script she had seen so little of:

> I shall help you make the change of cars in Chicago. That will be all I'll bother you till we reach New York. If you wish anything, send your porter for me.
>
> MACBETH.

She held the paper in her hand a long time while she looked out of the window at the mountains. Her face was very calm and cold.

But her fingers shook a little as she finally tucked his message into her pocket-book, where it lay with her mother's letter and a card covered with Thomas Rollins's heavy scrawl.

CHAPTER XIII.

New York Once More.

THE Western express rolled into the New York Central Station and came to a hissing stop.

At the door of his wife's stateroom Ronald Macbeth waited quietly while Aurora gathered up her little belongings and feed the porter. They stepped out together and went up the cement promenade toward the exit.

"Where shall you go?" Macbeth asked, without a trace of emotion in his voice.

"To the Carlton," she responded. "Will you see that my things are sent there?"

"Yes, I'll attend to it. I'll put up down-town somewhere and phone you my address."

He called for a taxi and helped her in. "I presume I had best see you to the hotel," he remarked, following her.

"It would be best," she assented.

"Shall I send word to your people?" he went on.

"No; I'll let them know myself. You know I cabled mother that we were sailing from Yokohama."

"I didn't know it," he said slowly. "Did you say 'we'?"

"Yes. And on thinking it over, I believe you had better come with me. Suppose we go up this afternoon? I'll phone first. You can get yourself settled and call for me at three. Then that will be all over with and I can go on with—"

"The divorce, of course," he finished for her. The taxi slowed up before the Carlton and he jumped out.

"I'll have them pay the man at the desk," she said quietly.

Ronald flushed. "Allow me." He handed the chauffeur a five-dollar bill and waved him off.

Aurora flushed too. She impulsively laid her hand on his arm. "I didn't mean *that*," she said gently.

"I owe you a certain amount of consideration," he returned. "I didn't understand how you felt about my ways. Now I'll leave you, after I've got you a suite."

"I don't want a suite, Ronald!"

"Please allow me," he said bitterly. "You know I have to register for you. You can send for a maid."

Three minutes later he left her with a bow and a brief, "I'll be back at three." Aurora went up to her new apartments, indifferent to the fact that from porter to elevator boy and maid word had gone around that Aurora Rollins was back in New York.

When her husband was announced she met him calmly. He noticed that she was dressed in a gown he had never before seen. Observant of his glance, she said, "One of those we bought in San Francisco."

At the curb stood a limousine. To the chauffeur Macbeth said curtly, "This is Mrs. Macbeth, for whom you will drive, if you please her."

One swift glance informed Aurora that the car was new and of the best. She bit her lip.

"You needn't have bought it for me," she said.

"I have some pride of my own in this matter," he returned soberly. "Not that I care for what people think. But I want you to know that I wish to make you comfortable. I had to make this purchase by wire. If it doesn't suit you, I'll buy another one."

She leaned back in the seat so that he might not see her face. "Did you do this because I said I hated you?" she asked in a low voice.

"Yes. I had never thought you felt that way toward me. When I realized that my ways vexed and embarrassed you I saw that the right thing to do was to make you comfortable—in your own way."

"In my own way," she repeated thoughtfully.

"I don't mean any sneer," he urged.

She nodded. "I don't misunderstand you. It merely struck me as a curious judgment on me."

His hasty disclaimer was silenced by her hand lightly laid on his arm. "We are here," she said gently. "I am glad you are with me."

"Thank you," he responded.

The great door opened and Aurora nodded to the butler. "I hope father and mother are at home, Stebbins?"

"Yes, miss—ma'am. In the library, ma'am."

She smiled back at Ronald and stepped quickly on, while he allowed his coat, hat, and stick to slip into the capable hands of a servant. Then he slowly followed her.

She had vanished before he reached the great valves where Stebbins stood. The butler bowed and he stepped three feet further, till he stood in the space of the great room.

His wife was kissing her mother and holding out one hand to her father,

who was puffing and blowing, evidently wholly surprised and unable to carry out some preconcerted plan of action.

"How are you, Mr. Rollins?" Ronald asked politely, without taking another step.

"Well, sir!" boomed the magnate.

Macbeth bowed slightly and caught Mrs. Rollins's wide-open eyes. "How do you do, ma'am?" he went on gravely.

Mrs. Rollins began to smile, stopped it, glanced hurriedly at her husband, and then turned in distress to her daughter.

"Ronald," said Aurora gently, "you had better come on in. Father, we have some affairs to talk over. In fact, Ronald and I are going to be divorced. And I thought we had better talk it over just in the family first."

Rollins glowered. At that moment the butler entered to ask in a discreet whisper of Aurora, "Your car, miss—ma'am? Shall I send it around to the garage?"

"Please, Stebbins," she said hastily. "Tell my chauffeur to ask William for some of that essence I always use in my motors.

"Yes," she went on, turning back to her father, "I knew it would be best all around if Ronald and I arranged the thing with you. It will save trouble on all sides. And he has to be going back very soon, anyway."

"I am glad you have come to your senses," remarked Mr. Rollins sourly. "I hear you have a motor. I suppose this young—er—husband of yours wants money from me."

"I'm sure I don't think so," she replied easily, and seated herself. "You see, you refused me any money, and I shall have to have a pretty good sum to live on, merely to keep up my position as Ronald's wife. Ronald thinks if he gives me forty thousand dollars cash to start on, it would be about right from him."

"Your position as Ronald's wife!" interrupted her mother, driving direct to the gist of the matter, as she saw it. "He has no position!"

"And no money," her father added significantly.

Aurora was evidently about to answer this, but a glance at Macbeth's unmoved countenance stilled the words on her lips. Her silence brought her father's keen eyes on them both. He was a very shrewd man, and his hatred of his perverse son-in-law had deepened bitterly the past year.

If Macbeth really had money, revenge was in his hands. Thomas Rollins was never helpless before a rich man. But he disguised his eagerness for the facts by saying curtly to Aurora, "You spent forty thousand a month when you lived at home."

"I suppose I did. But under the circumstances I think Ronald's offer is fair."

"I think we might start at the beginning of this," Macbeth put in gravely, "then everything will be plain."

"One thing is plain to *me*," Rollins said promptly. "You want some of my money, young man!"

"But that must be plain to *all* of us," Macbeth went mildly on. "I might explain a little, Aurora?"

"Please do."

Still standing, he went on, very soberly, "Your daughter and I were married, as you remember, almost a year ago."

"Continue," growled Rollins, throwing himself back into his chair.

"And now your daughter claims her freedom at my hands," Macbeth pursued very evenly. "I can do no less than grant it. Our own understanding on the subject is plain. She is entitled to and I expect to give her as much money as the courts may decree. Our suggestion is that I give her forty thousand dollars now, for attorney's fees and so on."

"Have you forty thousand—of your own?"

"I have—with me." Ronald took out his wallet and extracted two papers, one of which he handed his

father-in-law. Rollins started at it, half-closed his eyes, opened them again.

"All right. What next?"

"Aurora agrees to sue me for divorce on some simple ground that will involve no scandal. I agree not to contest the suit."

"Is that all?"

"That is all," Aurora interposed, "except that I wish you would ask my husband to sit down."

Macbeth bowed to her. "Thank you, I will stand. I have now only one other thing to say, and that is to Mr. Rollins.

"I want to return to him some papers which were handed me by a Los Angeles bank. I made a business memorandum of them at the time. Here are the papers, sir. You get your daughter back for nothing."

CHAPTER XIV.

Macbeth Holds His Own.

ROLLINS stared at the documents and then at his own card, lying on top of them. Before he could pick it up Aurora had snatched it.

Her cheeks crimsoned when she read the words that offered to buy her back for one hundred thousand dollars. She turned to Ronald with a strange, almost piteous dignity.

"Thank you for not letting me know about this. Yours was the act of a gentleman."

He merely smiled faintly and then turned to Mrs. Rollins. His face was suddenly winning, charmingly deferential. In spite of herself the old lady could not stiffen her expression.

"I want to tell you that I've tried to take good care of your beautiful daughter, ma'am," he said gently. "And now that I am no longer to look after her, may I ask that you will do so, no matter how you may think of me?"

There was a silence. Mrs. Rollins's eyes welled tears.

"Preposterous!" choked the magnate. "Who should look after her, if not her own parents?"

"True," Macbeth assented. "Yet I have done my best. I still have an interest in her welfare." He looked at Aurora. Something in that swift glance brought the blood to her cheeks. "That is all?" he asked her slowly.

She bowed her head.

Macbeth looked back at Rollins. His tone was icy as he said distinctly: "Might I beg to speak to my wife alone for a moment? It is for the last time."

Rollins stared balefully for a moment. "I imagine she has had enough of you."

Aurora recognized again the man she had known for a year in the Macbeth that repeated, in tones that brooked no denial, "I want to speak to her alone."

"Of course," she said simply. "We will go into the music-room, Ronald."

He held back the hangings for her and followed her down the great hall to the appointed place. Once within its precincts she swung toward him with a swift, "I have to apologize, Ronald! You did it so nicely and—I'm ashamed of them!"

"They are ignorant," he said curtly. "Now you are free. You realize that?"

"Yes."

"And our agreement is forever gone into the past?"

"Yes."

"I am not bound to you in any way? I am free, absolutely free?" he insisted.

"I think you may trust me to carry out the plan," she answered, her eyes blazing with injured pride. "If you must have it again I tell you now that I have no claim on you, not a word to say either for or against any act or word of yours. You are what you boast yourself to be, Macbeth of the North. Is that clear enough?"

He breathed deeply. "I have waited till I was free to explain to you why I accepted your offer last year.

"You have asked me why I spent so much money—I that grudge your head-waiters and taxi drivers and grooms their tips—when I got nothing for it. Under the terms of the agreement I could say nothing.

"You had simply come to me with the statement that you were sick and tired of New York and the people you had to live with. You told me that you felt sure that I would keep any bargain I made, and that you wished me to marry you and take you away for one year.

"You made the conditions yourself. I accepted them. Now I am going to tell you why I did that."

Her lips paled and he saw that she was inwardly afraid. But he went on in the same matter-of-fact tone:

"You were the most beautiful creature I had ever seen. You had done the biggest thing any woman of your class ever could do. I was used to looking for just such bigness, and I said to myself that I would marry you.

"I swore to myself that you should have your chance, because you deserved it, of seeing this world as it is, of getting away from this place of dreams and nightmares, and breathing the real air of life. It was worth the price, because I told myself that if you were really the woman you might be and seemed to be, you would be my mate, you would prove yourself my equal, and you would know that I was the man you should marry.

"That was the risk I took. I didn't know that I took a greater one, the one that ruined my hopes and made you—hate me."

She was silent, wide-eyed, her face filled with wonder. He controlled the bitterness in his voice.

"You see, I loved you. I found myself suddenly belittled in my own eyes, halted in my own chosen career by love for you. I loved you, Aurora, as I love you and always shall. That was my terrible mistake. But I did not know you hated me.

"You see, I thought—I dreamed that when this agreement between us was over and I was free to speak, I could come to you and tell you that I love you. It was only my promise that kept me silent, many times."

Her level gaze met his and he was dazzled by the splendid azure of her eyes.

"Do you know what was the greatest mistake you made, Ronald?"

"Loving you."

"No. It was keeping the terms of that agreement. I had married you. I was your wife. I went with you across the world. I was a woman. I went with you. And you allowed a miserable piece of wild foolishness to keep us apart. You say you wanted me. Why didn't you take me—while you had me?"

She saw the blood surge to his temples and then recede. For an instant his eyes burned to her heart.

Slowly he regained his self-mastery. But in that moment she knew why he was Macbeth of the North, the man a scattered folk prayed to.

"I keep my promises," he said with a profound sadness. "And the fact that I did so saved you from being the *wife* of the man you hate."

She lowered her eyes. "At any rate, I can never forget you, as you boast," she said in a low voice.

"And that means that you will never cease to hate me."

Slowly she saw again the north, with its floe-bound islands, its gray and stormy seas, its cold sky, its flashing lights in the firmament. The great room, with all its appointments of luxury and ease, dissolved away.

The roar of the city changed to the ceaseless thunder of the surf. The shrill cry of a child in the street was the shriek of a circling gull.

And in that vast vista she saw a single figure, stern, austere, masterful—Macbeth of the North.

He said nothing to break in upon her reverie. Before his eyes were the same scenes, bare, desolate, sterile forever.

Outside the door sounded the respectful voice of Stebbins. "Shall I call the car, ma'am?"

Instantly the walls closed in about them. Aurora glanced round the room and shivered. "Ronald, I wish you would do one more thing for me," she said.

"What is that?"

"Take me back to my apartments."

"Certainly. But I thought you might wish—"

"No," she said decisively. "I'll have plenty of this later."

As the car rolled smoothly down the avenue Aurora sat in silence. After a commonplace remark Ronald, too, said nothing.

Under the lights of the hotel entrance she dismissed the car with a nod. To Macbeth she turned with a quick, "I wish you would come up for a moment."

"Is it—hadn't I better—"

"I have something to give back to you, if you'll take it," she answered briefly.

He said no more, but followed her to the elevator and to the door of the apartment. She invited him in with a gesture and went on into the drawing-room.

With another gesture she dismissed the promptly appearing maid. She flung off coat and hat and snapped on more of the lights till the room fairly blazed.

Then she said awkwardly: "As you say, Ronald, a great mistake has been made. Enough mistakes, God knows! I want your honest answer to this one question: Do you love me?"

He let hat and gloves fall on the table.

"It is quite true that I love you, Aurora."

She faced him stormily. "Then we have both made a terrible mistake. You have done me a bitter wrong. It is for you to make it right."

She held out her left hand. Two rings shone on it—a wedding-ring and the engagement diamond. "Do you understand?" she whispered.

He met her eyes. "I don't. If you hate them so, throw them away."

"I can't. I am still your wife! Oh, Ronald! I am still your wife!" she said breathlessly.

"That's true," he said heavily. "I am sorry."

Unshed tears brightened her gaze. "Are you going to make the same mistake again?" she whispered. She clutched the fingers of her right hand about the plain band. "Are you going to make it again? You are the man who boasted you had taken me from a whole cityful of men—taken *me*, the most beautiful of all the women in the greatest city in the world.

"You boasted you had married me. I still wear your ring—as I've worn it since you took me. Am I to hate you and myself forever? Think, Ronald! Look! Shall I give you back your ring?"

In her sheer passion she was beyond any loveliness he had ever dreamed of. She quivered before him, palpitant, shimmering with allure, dazzlingly gorgeous. He stared into her eyes steadily, and very slowly his face set in lines she had never seen.

His voice seemed to come from his very secret heart.

"I want you."

Then his eyes flamed up. "This is *my* apartment. This is *my* place. And you are *my* wife. You are wearing *my* ring. What do I care for your hate?"

He met her furious gaze and her eyes clouded. "You are *mine*," he said. "And nobody shall ever take you away from me in all eternity."

Straining back against his arms she flung her hot words into his face: "I hate you! I *hate* you!"

But his arms slowly closed about her and she was drawn to him, eyes ablaze, lips parted in breathless and inarticulate speech.

Thus Ronald Macbeth took his mate to himself.

(The end.)

SERENADE

A SERIAL IN II PARTS—PART I

BY ROTHVIN WALLACE

Author of "The Peril," "Discomfiting Diana," "A Broken Talisman," etc.

CHAPTER I.

The Face on the Screen.

THE bored expression that for one hour had seamed Stuart Duncan's face was wiped away suddenly, as by a sponge. He leaned forward in the hard, uncomfortable chair, a look of intense interest in his eyes, lips half opened, and his breath coming hard.

His knees hit the back of the chair in the row ahead, but he did not notice that. He did not notice anything save the great screen upon which the motion-picture machine projected its alluring pageant of quaint Robidoux Island. But the gaze he fastened upon that was so eager that it appeared possible for it fairly to burn up the canvas.

For the second time the face of the girl was shown.

A brunette she was—a brunette with such masses of blue-black hair coiled at the nape of her neck that it drew her head back just enough for the exquisite chin of her to be uptilted a trifle. The perfectly carved lips were tantalizingly parted, maddeningly inviting in the innocent abandon of her joy; but, at the same time, suggesting a depth of character, a pride of blood, that would hotly resent any familiarity.

Her delicate nostrils were quivering, and from beneath the hair the daintiest ear-lobe peeked out at him, distractingly coquettish. She was divinely tall and slender and young, yet her every gliding step betrayed a grace of carriage, with a dignity that can be acquired only by birth, and birth alone.

At the head of a motley procession of peasants and sailors, attired in the costumes of the eighteenth century, she marched, leaning lightly upon the arm of a tall, hawk-visaged man—made up to seem in the early fifties, but obviously much younger—serenely indifferent to everything except dignifying the character she impersonated.

Not even the tightly laced bodice nor the huge sweep to the heavily brocaded skirts distracted her attention for one moment. And then she passed, leaving the pageant to move on its course, fascinatingly unusual. But Stuart Duncan closed his eyes and leaned back in his chair, deep furrows plowed straight across his forehead.

He was thinking of the girl, revisualizing her. He looked again, and the flashes which show the perforated end of a film struck his eyes; then he sprang into the aisle, waving a commanding hand toward the operator in his tiny loft.

"Run that reel again!" he cried.

The sound of his own voice brought him to a realization of the fact that he was making a spectacle of himself. For the merest fraction of a second, feeling the astonished eyes of the scanty audience upon him, he longed for the floor to rise up and obscure him; then he decided to wait until his command had been obeyed.

And there had been something of command, an air of authority and certainty about his manner, that brought its result.

He studied the film closely, making out that it was a pageant peculiar to the island, commemorative of some great event in its history. Even the takers of the picture seemed a trifle hazy as to just what the significance of that event really was. And then the girl walked slowly across the screen once more, and her eyes looked out of the picture, and to Stuart Duncan they seemed to pierce the veil that separated them and to call aloud to him.

In thousands of theaters would the picture be shown, and hundreds of thousands—yes, millions—of persons would gaze upon it.

Some of them would gape at a wonderfully beautiful girl in curious surroundings, and more would not; but she had looked out of the picture at *him*, and he had looked out of this audience at *her*, and adown the long lane separating Manhattan from Robidoux Island he had seen her and longed to know her.

Chance, Fate, Destiny—call it what you will—must have been at the bottom of it all. He never had attended a motion-picture show before, and it had required a world of circumstance to bring him to the little Sixth Avenue nickelodeon now. Yesterday he was lying on Bailey's Beach—cool, contented, and happy.

Then remembrance of Billy Faulkner's wedding had pierced his mental lethargy. Had he been less a Scotchman and more an Irishman, he would have kissed felicitations *via* the wire. Being Stuart Duncan, however, he had caught the Newport Express and all day had roamed New York's sticky asphalt, vainly trying to murder time.

Everybody was out of town.

Roof gardens and tinkling drinks in long, thin glasses, the myriad lights, and the scorching heat of the dog-days bored him. New York was a tomb-city to him. To resist the well-nigh unconquerable instinct for flight he had feverishly sought some amusement that was different, and in the finding had seen a girl, *the* girl, looking out of a picture.

Yesterday he had grieved for Billy Faulkner's folly in chaining himself for life, forsaking the clubs, little impromptu supper parties—the thousand and one joys to which the benedick bids farewell. But with the clatter of a picture-machine his entire view-point was changed; a reef had been taken in his sails, leaving him completely veered about.

As he looked upon the girl's image an overwhelming longing to press his palms caressingly over those cheeks, cause those upturned lips to cling upon his own, to feel her heart throb against his heart, seized and held him, making him shiver with the intensity of the desire. And then a hand plucked at his sleeve and an employee of the theater squatted down beside him, studying him curiously.

"You the young fellow that asked for the picture on the island again?" he questioned.

Stuart regarded him coldly for a second; then it occurred to him that here was one who might tell him where Robidoux Island was located. He had cruised many thousands of miles in his yacht, the Runaway, but never had he even heard of, much less sighted, such a spot. From the costumes, the houses, the appearance of the people, he knew it to be French, probably some land-speck under French suzerainty.

"Yes, I liked the film," he answered cordially, then slipped a bank-note into the man's eager palm. "For your trouble," he explained; then, carelessly, as though a matter of supreme indifference to him: "You don't happen to know where Robidoux Island is, do you?"

"Nope—never heard of it until this film came along. But you can find out at the film exchange to-morrow."

Stuart carefully took down the address of the place suggested, then

strolled out into the stifling heat. Hailing a taxi, he ordered the chauffeur to drive, leaning back against the hot cushions, eyes closed as he recalled the face.

A wild impatience was upon him to go to her; an inexplicable emotion surged within him which caused him to wonder whether he was the victim of a sunstroke. He did not want to wait till morning to find out where her island home was located. He must know now, immediately.

He told the driver to take him to the club.

Indifferently he passed the perspiring, weary members, held "on the spot" by business and market, searching out the library. He had been there only a few times before, despite six years' membership.

In vain, after explaining his visit to the librarian, he pored over an atlas. It seemed full enough of statistics to reveal everything concerning the universe, much less a simple earth. But Robidoux Island was not to be found. He imagined wildly that perhaps Robidoux Island had received a hint of his search and was playing hide-and-seek with him.

A heavy hand fell upon his shoulder, just as he was dropping into the nethermost depths of gloom and statistics. He looked up into the jolly, red face of Jack Sands, and Jack was amused.

"What fetches you to town in such weather, and what brings you to the library?" he demanded with a great, rumbling laugh.

"I," moodily returned Stuart, "am looking for Robidoux Island."

"I bite — spring it," cheerfully retorted Sands. "Why does the chicken cross the road? Where is it?"

"No; it's a regular place, old man. I just saw a motion picture taken on the island while the inhabitants were holding some sort of celebration, and—"

He stopped short, realizing that his face had gone very red, and that a wave of heat was traveling from under his collar and up across his features, disappearing in the roots of his hair. Jack Sands was speaking, ruminatively.

"And a pretty little moving picture actress smites the eye of the much sought young millionaire clubman, Stuart Duncan, who has been given up as a hopeless bachelor by all the mamas in town. She is beautiful under all the paint, and—"

"She wasn't an actress, at all," indignantly came the sharp protest; then, sighting the amazement in his clubmate's eyes, Duncan bit his lips. Sands vented a low whistle.

"Well, well, well, here is a knocker! And you mean to say that you, a hard-headed Scot, have fallen for a pictured face?"

"I don't know what to call it, how to explain," frankly confessed Duncan. "The girl walked down the street of this queer, tiny village; her eyes looked out of the picture straight at me, and—well, old man, I curled up right there—wilted. Then I ordered the thing run off again—just made a blooming ass of myself right in that cheesy theater. Now, then, laugh!"

Sands thoughtfully stared at the younger man, then moodily tapped his own head.

"Romance," he sighed. "It got me away from the ticker while I landed Kate, and now it's landing you. I knew it would. It gets everybody at some time. Kate always said you weren't nearly so impregnable as people thought —that you were just waiting for the right one to come along."

"I believe she's come," asserted Stuart smilingly. But there was a seriousness behind the smile that belied the lightness of his tone.

"And she lives on an island you can't locate?"

"Don't bother about my locating it."

Jack grunted contemptuously as he laid a fat hand on his companion's shoulder.

"My boy," he asserted gravely, "I never heard of finding any island but Robinson Crusoe's in a book. Why

look in a book for an island, when everybody knows that islands are watery products? And the way to look for a watery product is either to take a boat, or wander toward a buffet—whither, it being hot and humid, we are now going."

Duncan's shoulder quivered under his friend's hand. He snapped his teeth shut, but the glint in his eyes showed that the suggestion of Mr. Jack Sands had been taken more seriously than that gentleman dreamed.

"A good idea, Jack," he muttered. "That way I'll find the island and her at the same time."

But Sands did not hear. His throat was too parched for giving heed to but one thing.

CHAPTER II.

On Board the Runaway.

STUART DUNCAN had been silent for several minutes, while he absently sipped the frosted julep that a club waiter had placed before him. The grill was practically deserted, and Jack Sands, sitting opposite, found little to divert him, except to study the perturbed face of his companion.

"Don't take it so hard," he said lightly, after tiring of this single tedious occupation.

"Eh?" Stuart awakened from his reverie with a start.

"I said come out of it."

"What?"

"What? Oh, the devil! What could I have reference to, other than the trance you have been in for the last five minutes?"

"I'm thinking." Again young Duncan laid his cheek in the palm of his right hand, and gazed vacuously into the mint leaves that adorned his glass.

"Don't! You may injure yourself!" cried Jack in mock alarm.

"I was thinking about what you said," mumbled Stuart.

"What did I say? Tell me, my noble romanticist, was it anything terrible?"

"That the place to look for an island was in the water." Stuart paid no attention to his friend's chaff.

"Well, that brilliant idea does require a lot of thought. Now, I—"

"Hah! I win!" cried an exultant voice at his back.

"Major Condé," greeted Jack, turning. "What'll you have, major?"

"Have it on me," effervesced the major.

His walrus mustache of snowy whiteness and military twirl twitched as he laughed. He extended a strong, well-groomed hand to Jack and Stuart in turn. "You must have the drinks with me, because I've just won a bet on you two chaps," he announced.

"A bet on us?" Stuart manifested a degree of interest that was out of keeping with his recent mood.

"Just so. When I came in, Westover told me that something was the matter with both of you, because he had seen you in the library. I almost called him a liar, and finally bet him ten that, if you were in the club at all, you could be found in the grill room with something wet and cold between you. And here you are, just as I predicted, and I—"

"Lose the bet," laughed Sands. "We were in the library, where Duncan was searching an atlas for the position of a place called Robidoux Island."

"Robidoux Island!" cried the major. His manner changed instantly from gay to grave. "What have you fellows to do with Robidoux Island?"

"Do you know where it is?" asked Stuart eagerly.

"It has been twenty years since I have seen Robidoux Island, but—"

"Where is it?" cut in young Duncan impatiently. At that moment he had no ear for Major Condé's reminiscences.

"Fifty miles or so off the north Atlantic coast, about—but I can give you the exact latitude and longitude presently. Why are you so anxious to know?"

"Oh, Stuart has seen the picture of a girl who evidently lives there. Now he's thinking of doing some mad thing, but just what it is to be I don't believe he has exactly determined." Jack lighted a cigarette and blew rings at the ceiling.

"Well, Robidoux Island is a place of romance," said the major gravely. He nodded his white head approvingly in Stuart's direction. "It was settled long ago by the old Duc de Robidoux, who, with a shipload of retainers, left France when the Bourbons were expelled. French he made it, French it has been ever since, and French it doubtless shall remain, unless the Bourbons should be returned to power, and the inhabitants flock back to the mother country. French justice rules it, French notions of honor are the standards by which the people live. I suppose it belongs to the United States, yet it is farther from this country than even the Spanish speaking republics to the south."

The major sighed deeply, then smiled as he arose to take his leave.

"You have touched a very responsive chord in me, my boy, when you mention this last stand of the Bourbons. I am an old sentimentalist, I suppose, but, would you mind telling me where you saw this wonderful picture?"

Duncan did so, and, when the stately old major had departed, he turned decisively on Jack, while his clenched fist came down on the table with a whack of resolution.

"We'll start to-night," he said.

"We?"

"You and Kate and I."

"Not on your young life. Think I'm going to annoy myself and my wife by going out and helping you chase love bugs around the Atlantic Ocean.

"Be a nice fellow," wheedled Stuart. "It will be a jolly good lark, and you and Kate haven't been married so long that you wouldn't enjoy spooning on the moonlit deck of—"

"Oh, slush!" groaned Sands.

"The moon's at its full now, and—"

"That may account for it."

"What?"

"Your condition."

"Quit spoofing and come along," cajoled Stuart.

There was a look in his friend's eyes that Jack Sands studied for a full minute before replying.

"Do you know," he said presently, and in sober earnestness, "I have a hunch that you are going to need me on this trip. Wait; I'll ask Kate."

"And, while you are phoning, I'll direct Captain Freese to get the Runaway in readiness at once."

Ten minutes later they were back at their table, with their noses in fresh sprigs of fragrant mint.

"I'm glad that Kate consented to go," Sands was saying. "But don't tell her that I said 'slush,' when you referred to the moonlit deck and all that sort of thing. Will you?"

"Not if you behave," evaded Stuart. "And I'm glad that both of you are going with me, and that Captain Freese agreed to hustle preparations on board the Runaway. He's a queer old codger, and takes many liberties because of his long service in my family."

Now that his mind was made up, and his friends had promised to accompany him on his adventure, Stuart Duncan was happy as a boy; and he behaved more like a boy, thrilling with ecstasy at the prospect of attending the county fair, than a grown man, the master of millions.

But he felt that he had sufficient reason to be joyous. For was he not going out in search of the most exquisitely beautiful girl who ever had lived? Visualizing her, he believed all of that, and he felt a sickening sense of horror when he thought that she might prefer to have nothing of him.

What if she were married? He shuddered at the likelihood of such a situation. Suppose she had a sweetheart? Well, that wasn't quite so bad. Jack interrupted his flow of thought.

"At what time shall we start?"

"About nine o'clock."

"Then we've got to hurry. Come with Kate and me to dinner?"

"Thanks. Don't mind if I do. But say, old man, let's not tell Kate anything about the girl in the case, will you?"

"Why not?"

"Well, she might—er—object, you know, or something; and besides, it would be a good idea to hand her a little surprise at the finish. I fancy women rather like surprises of that sort. It makes 'em feel as if they were reading the latest best seller or attending one of those romantic dramas."

"All right," laughed Jack. "We'll surprise Kate."

To Stuart Duncan's delight, there came no further impediment to his plans, and the Runaway got off at the appointed time. And to his additional pleasure—and much to his amusement—Kate Sands took full advantage of the romantic moonlight; nor did her confessedly practical husband dare discountenance the urge that called him to play the rôle of the gallant cavalier to his pretty wife.

And it was a wonderful moon that drenched the sound and its eery shores as the Runaway pushed its sharp nose into the easy swells that surged in from the rolling Atlantic.

Stuart paced the deck restlessly, while the married lovers lounged on a deep-seated divan that graced the afterdeck, and conversed in whispers. And Stuart, in the meanwhile, wondered at the strange spell that had come upon him, prosaic man of the world that he always had been.

Was it the image of that fair girl that actually had lured him to attempt this mad pursuit, or was it merely the result of his latent liking for adventure? At that moment he could not determine which.

Three days later Stuart still was pacing the deck nervously. This form of exercise had been his chief diversion ever since the Runaway had set out upon her cruise. He paused as he came on Jack Sands, who was hanging disconsolately over the starboard rail.

Jack never had been a good sailor, and, as usual, he was suffering all the tortures of mal de mer.

"Buck up," advised Stuart cheerfully. "We ought to be there almost any moment now, as nearly as I can figure."

"Lot of good that'll do me," groaned his friend. "And besides, Kate's going to find out that I have been deceiving her about the purpose of this trip, and there's going to be hell to pay. Wait till you get married, and—"

Jack paused disgustedly as he noticed that his audience had wandered heedlessly to the bow of the boat. There he stood, tranquilly leveling a large binocular at a distant speck of land.

The Runaway danced on merrily, thrusting aside the heavy swells that rushed upon her, cleaving them as with a knife and using each sea as a toboggan down which to glide.

"Fine mess I've got into," growled the miserable Jack Sands. "I bet if I ever—"

A sudden throbbing, grinding sound from the engine room drowned his words and brought a groan from the tortured man. But Stuart Duncan's eyes glowed and his face grew as animated as a boy's as Captain Freese approached him.

"There's Froggie's Island, Mr. Duncan," announced the captain gruffly, waving a contemptuous hand toward the northeast.

"Hug into it," commanded the owner anxiously. "Don't be afraid of scratching the paint on the Runaway."

Captain Freese started to reply, but thought better of it and remained silent.

"What a funny-looking rock," observed Mrs. Sands, who had joined the little party.

"It's called Attentezvous rock," informed the captain. "See the light on

top? That beacon has saved many a good ship from goin' to the fishes."

A crescent-shaped island, not more than twenty miles long, loomed before them, curling around the huge bulk that Captain Freese had designated Attentezvous rock. In the center of the shore line, nestling among the sharp-toothed rocks, appeared a beautiful stretch of beach, its sands taking up the rays of the sun that was just breaking through the clouds and scattering them in a prismatic riot.

Low-lying, ragged cliffs composed the remainder of the shore line. Against these the green waves dashed harshly with an ominous roar. There they broke in a white lather, spewing out their protest at their thwarted efforts to reach and ruin the verdant interior of the island. And down almost to the water came a heavy spruce and pine forest, green with a greenness that soothed and rested the eye.

Behind this barrier of waving green they could catch an occasional glimpse of a tiny building, and once, for a fleeting second, the group on the yacht sighted a magnificent château, which disappeared so swiftly that they mutually put it down to a vagary of their imaginations.

As they looked the speed of the engines was reduced and the Runaway slipped past the looming Attentezvous that broke the fury of the inrushing sea and made a small, natural harbor in a pocket of the island. Under the towering beacon that crested the rock swept the yacht, into the smooth waters of this harbor, while those who stood on the forward deck marveled at the rugged, primeval beauties of cliff and sea and beach and wood.

"There, sir, is your island," rumbled Captain Freese. "What do you want done with it?"

Stuart dismissed him with a glance.

The next moment the anchors of the Runaway splashed overboard, and the yacht rested under the beacon of Robidoux, in the shadow of the island's towering sentinel. Just then Mrs. Sands came out of what had appeared to be a long period of introspective thought. She paused before her husband and drew her petite, rounded figure up with surpassing dignity.

"Jack Sands," she demanded, "tell me what you know about this nonsensical trip. *Who* is the woman? Look at Stuart Duncan, and don't try to tell me that there isn't a woman in it."

But just as Sands turned his weary, washed-out eyes to obey, Stuart's binocular fell heavily to the deck, and that young man appeared to be on the point of bounding into the water. His eyes were fastened eagerly upon a small boat just emerging from behind a mass of savage rocks.

Mrs. Jack sprang to his side, her eyes as intent as his own. But it was not the boat that held her gaze. Instead, they were looking at the person who propelled the oars — a radiant girl, who drove her tiny craft with long, easy sweeps. So close she came that she must have felt the shadow of the Runaway, but she gave the yacht no heed.

A rare brunette she was, and the sun seemed so glad of seeing her that he pushed his mighty shoulders through the obscuring clouds and stared boldly down, shooting out darts of golden flame that nestled in the wonderful blue-black hair of her. She looked up, scanning the heavens narrowly, and the watchers saw that her eyes were steady and level and undeviating, and of so deep a brown that there seemed possible no plumbing of their inscrutable depths.

And her beautiful lips were parted just enough for the perfect teeth to glimmer at them. Tall, slender and lithe she was, with the delightful immaturity that promises a perfection that not even a Phidias was able to suggest.

The girl reached the beach, hauled her boat from the water; then, in a long, swinging run, she disappeared from view. Stuart's fascinated eyes watched her until she was gone, watched the place where he had seen

her last, watched the rocks from behind which she had appeared. Then, with a deep sigh, he turned to Kate Sands.

"Do you wonder," he questioned simply, "that I traveled all this way to find her—to find and see her?"

CHAPTER III.

Serenade.

"WHO," demanded Kate acridly, "is that woman?"

Stuart turned blankly to Jack, only to find him convulsed with silent mirth. He gazed toward the shore, the sentinel rock, the strip of beach up which a long-limbed, graceful figure had disappeared. He closed his eyes in silent ecstasy at the recollection.

"Who?" he murmured. "Yes, Kate, that's it. Who is she? I've come all this way to find out, that's why I brought—"

He stopped short, at the antagonistic glint in her eyes, realizing that he had been on the verge of making a most awkward admission. A wheedling smile played about the corners of his mouth. "I'm going to find out, Kate, and you're going to help me. I know you are."

But Mrs. Jack was not to be so easily coaxed.

There was more behind this than appeared on the surface. She pondered a second over Stuart's flushed face, and the strange expression on her husband's, realizing that, in some way, she had been made a dupe.

Then she flounced irately to her room, leaving the men to stare miserably at each other, wondering how best to make their peace, and, at the same time, win Kate to Stuart's cause.

All that day the Runaway swayed lightly at anchor, like a dainty blue and white and gold cork bobbing about upon the rushing current. And Stuart Duncan stood at the rail throughout the day, forgetful of his duties as host and owner, forgetful of existence, forgetful of everything save the vision that floated tantalizingly before his eyes—the girl who had looked out at him from the screen.

Night found him there, night with the chill of the North Atlantic.

He did not know he was cold until Kate came close to him, and firmly, but gently, led him to the after-deck, where Jack, snuggled up in a huge steamer rug, was sipping luxuriously at a hot toddy. And there they sat in silence, staring into the blackness that had fallen upon the island.

Grimly outlined against the darkness of the waters, casting a heavier, more ominous shadow, the giant rock waved its head at them, retreating and advancing lightly according to the mirror-like action of the plashing waves upon it. Grotesque forms emerged from the island, waving eery fingers, dancing ludicrous sarabands, for the trees were indulging in their nightly frolic with the darkness.

Here and there a light would glimmer on the beach, through the woods—flicker and die away. Then the lazy moon rolled into view, resting her body upon the heart of the forest, lolling from side to side, lazily content to watch her star children timorously flutter into wakefulness.

It was as though some celestial gardener had removed the warming-sheet from his precious posy beds, for all the stars were out, winking and blinking from their long slumber. Stuart was talking, slowly, reflectively, a haunting melancholy in his voice—talking to Kate.

"No, I don't know who she is. I know only that I want to know. I know only that, when I saw her picture, her eyes, her lips seemed to be calling to me. And as I looked into those eyes I knew only that, of all the women in the world, I wanted to see her. She called to me from hundreds of thousands, yes, from millions of people who looked upon her face—called to me, and—"

He threw out his hands in a pitiful

gesture toward shore, then laughed at the astonished expression of Kate's face. "Well, here we are, and that's the reason for it," he confessed.

Jack Sands leaned forward in his chair. He had known in advance that mal-de-mer would smite him on the trip, but he had suffered it for just this moment.

"Stuart"—there was an ominous calm in Kate's voice—"you are a very young man, and know nothing about women. Oh, I know you are a year older than I, but *I* have lived, dear boy."

She glanced significantly toward the intent, stout man, who instantly assumed a far-away expression of indifference. "You do not know this woman, and yet she looked at you, called to you from all the millions? You speak in riddles, and I frankly confess I don't understand you. You don't know her, and still she *looks* at you and *calls* to you—"

Stuart shook his head smilingly.

"You wouldn't understand, Kate. It was at a moving-picture show. I had just dropped in—don't know why, unless Fate pulled me there—and they were showing the picture of a pageant on this queer, little island. And at the head of it, leaning on the arm of a man, was this girl. She looked out of the picture for a moment, Kate, with eyes that were the truest and most beautiful eyes I have ever seen.

"Her chin was tilted back, Kate; and her lips were half opened, and she seemed to be calling aloud to me with those lips. And I waited there while the film was ticked off again, and again she appeared; and again her eyes sought and found my own, and I knew that I wanted to find this girl—that I must know her. And I know now that—I want her; *want* her, Kate. I want to put the things I used to dream of some day seeing into those eyes, and I want—I want a regular introduction," he finished lamely. "Come, Kate, you're the best fixer-up in town; fix it for me—just this once."

"And you," Kate Sands murmured, amazed incredulity in her voice, "are the Stuart Duncan I have known all my life. You, the hard-headed Scot, Stuart Duncan, of New York, are romanticizing in this way to me. Why, you dear infant, I know nothing about the girl. Of course I sha'n't fix it up, lend myself to such a silly thing. If you're determined to meet her, fix it yourself."

"Might serenade her, *à la troubadour d'Seville,*" chuckled Sands. "There's nothing gets a girl like a little music. I used to lie awake nights, tossing on a feverish bed, longing for the voice which had been given by a beneficent Providence to a canny Scot named Stuart Duncan, and which his unromantic soul would never find use for, save as a penny-catcher with the university glee club.

"I would say to myself that surely Kate would listen to my dulcet voice—but I had no voice, dulcet or otherwise. I could only just play on a comb, covered with tissue-paper, and the songs I played on it suggested musical comedy, and Kate never did approve of my going to such shows so often, so—"

"There are times, Jack Sands," haughtily announced Mrs. Jack, rising from her chair and drawing the rug firmly about her prettily rounded shoulders, "when I fear that you are a fool, and then there come moments when I not only fear, but know it for a fact."

"Humph! Went a bit too far that time," mournfully soliloquized the stout man, as he watched the trim figure of his wife disappear—heard the angry clicking of her heels upon the deck.

Stuart smiled, but did not answer. His eyes were fastened upon the shore, the maxillary muscles working resolutely, while, even by the light of the firmament, a blush could be seen overspreading his face. Sands caught the flush, and could not resist shooting in another barb.

"Give ear to an old married man, Stuart. Do the Lochinvar stunt. Women like it, even though they do scratch your face when you first haul 'em across the saddle-bow. Get over there and serenade her. Hand her a few yards of that rich barytone the audiences used to go so wild about in the old college days. Reel off a couple of miles of the tinkle-tankle stuff on the guitar. Be a regular fellow.

"You see a face in a picture. You see the picture in Sixth Avenue's romantic atmosphere. The gurl-l is in the picture. She is on a lonely island. She may be in distress. She may some day learn to love the young man. And so the young man comes in his gallant yacht, the Runaway; comes for hundreds of miles, braving the perils of the vast deep and subjecting himself to the scorn and contumely of the feminine side of the party. Tell her about that, my boy; tell her about it. It'll make a hit — bound to. But — take the tip of an old romanticist — 'ware the dogs! When you go on this serenade be sure you carry along a hunk of poisoned meat."

With which sound advice Mr. Jack Sands lighted a fresh cigar and slowly strolled forward, his brow knitted with the very definite problem of appeasing his wife.

Stuart watched him disappear, a sheepish grin on his face. Then he rose and paced the deck in circles, evidently fighting within himself against some vagrant fancy. His eyes were fastened upon the shore, the stars, the moon, seeking an answer there to the question harassing him.

And all the shadows coaxed him on, flagrantly flirting with him, brazenly inviting him to enter into the spirit of their play-spell. He tiptoed guiltily toward the stern, peering down at the tiny, trailing dory, bobbing about on its slender hawser.

Grinning boyishly, he lowered the accommodation ladder; then turned back, laughing aloud.

"If I'm bound to make a fool of myself, might as well go the whole hog," he muttered.

With which remark he sneaked to the saloon, taking from the wall a guitar, with which he often whiled away a dull hour; then, with many a backward glance, he stole back to the yacht's stern.

Down the accommodation ladder he scrambled, half sliding in his haste. Putting his knees about the guitar's long neck, he slipped the oars in the dory's locks; then silently paddled toward the rocks, from behind which the girl had come into sight that morning.

Taking an identical course, he found rowing easy. Now and then a swift current would seize him; but he finally landed, dragging the boat high up the beach. Then he made for the woods, through which he could distinguish a glimmering light.

When he came upon it he breathed a sigh of relief to find it leading to a great estate, a giant, rambling house, led to by a long gravel path. He started to move forward, but the steady crunch of his heels upon the little stones caused him to recall Jack's hint regarding dogs, and he took to the grass.

A triumph of nature and the landscape gardener's art were the grounds within which the old mansion nestled. Not one of the great, black rocks had been removed from the lawn, but had been made to form a contrast against the sheen of the grass, perfectly trimmed and rolled, the artistically arranged flower-beds.

And the gravel-walks, broad and sinuous, wandered through the place, always breaking in upon a stretch of lawn which was unrelieved by anything save its natural covering. Everything was but a natural setting for the house.

A broad gravel-walk stretched from the crazy little road straight up to its

wide porch. Great elms stood like sentinels upon either side the walk, forming a dim vista, a sort of sentry-like arch, past and under which one must march to reach the piazza.

The foliage from these trees was so lofty, however, as to give Stuart a good conception of what the place was like. He studied it carefully, uncertain where the girl might be found—uncertain, really, whether this was her home.

Originally it had been a good-sized house, but constant additions had made it fairly enormous. The central portion of it was built after the fashion of the old châteaux one finds scattered about Avignon, and, to a lesser extent, Blois, a maze of gables and overhanging eaves and jutting bedrooms and pantries — all encompassed by an enormous, encircling porch on the first floor and larger balcony on the second.

It was significant of the tastes of the later owners that none of the many additions had departed from these balconies, thus giving to each set of rooms that had been joined to the first structure a semblance of orderliness, where, otherwise, the mansion might have looked like the crazy quilt of an architect's nightmare.

Without any other appearance of system save this, the great place rambled wheresoever it listed, now striking out toward the ocean with an enormous gun-room and sun-parlor, again digging into the lawn with a small, one-storied nursery.

A brobdignagian house it seemed to Stuart Duncan, yet there was an air of cheerfulness about it, such an atmosphere as only comes from an old home wherein happy lives have been lived. It seemed, from its size, that nothing could save it from gloom.

One might live forever in one section of the place and never hear a sound from another. Perhaps it was the yellow paint adorning it that saved the home from the appearance of desolation.

The huge moon glowing upon it now made of it a golden spectacle, refracting itself from the myriad windows till they scintillated like diamonds, while the great elms rigidly held their bayonets ready for the defense of this treasure-house they had been set so many years before to guard.

But only the shadows and the moon played upon the windows now—save one.

It was a very timid light glowing from one window on the extreme right wing of the place. The light of a candle it must have been; but it held the eye of the would-be serenader, as a lodestone holds the steel filing.

Suddenly it flickered, wavered, then went out.

His long row, the watching, had been in vain. And then—to the balcony — glided a tall, slender figure, leaving the long French blinds, from behind which she had stepped, half open. Bathed in moonlight she stood there, her rounded arms resting upon the balustrade, her eyes staring wistfully into the night.

Only the stars caressed her as she watched, the stars and moon — and Stuart Duncan.

Grimm might have sent one of his fairies there to wave her magic wand, calling the girl into being against that mystic background of the old mansion, so much a spirit of the night did she appear. Intangible as a dream, she stood upon the balcony, the magnificent gown enhancing the unreality of her.

It was a superbly cut satin, creamy-white, so that the gorgeous, blue-black hue of her hair, dressed atop her head, gained even a richer glow from the moonbeams playing in its heavy coils. A gown of another century it was, with long, tight bodice, which only one of her superb grace and supple waist could have worn.

It had a great, stiff collar of lace, which aided her hair in drawing back her head upon the slender, rounded

throat, giving a pensive expression to the chin; the warm, red lips, a pensiveness borrowing a bit of sorrow from the deep-set, steady, unwavering eyes of unfathomable brown.

A heavy jabot of yellowed lace fell from her throat, a lace that matched the flounces of lace that fell in heavy panels from the waist, out to a train which she had swept about her so that it accentuated the lines of her exquisite figure.

Lace it was such as a million spiders might have spent their lives spinning, masses of it, and yet so delicate and fine and of such symmetry of design that the chiffon underskirt beneath, with its varicolors, penetrated through the old yellow of it, harmonized with it, and splashed the entire gown with a color scheme that attracted and at the same time satisfied the eye, accentuating every point that was finest in the beauty of the wearer.

But from the head, neatly crowning the black masses of hair, fell cascades of the same exquisite lace, rippled out from the slender waist of her, tossed itself carelessly down the length of the skirt and hid itself in the voluminous folds of the long train—the veil of a bride.

Stuart Duncan felt something catching at his throat, constricting him; then he laughed aloud to himself. But a masquerade it must be, for the hour was near midnight. The lonely girl had attired herself as a bride in the bridal gown of one of her ancestors of the long ago.

He recalled the costume she had worn in the pageant scene that had been depicted on the screen, the obvious delight she had taken in wearing it, the practise she must have had to have carried its wearing off so wonderfully well.

This was no bride, he thought. The red rose glowing against the cream and yellow of her gown immediately above the waist should have told him as much. He suddenly became possessed by an unconquerable desire to call that rose his own. The girl—the girl — she was too beautiful ever to think of attaining.

Breathless, he stared, stared with his very soul in his eyes, his lips moving in a silent prayer that she might look down upon him, pierce with her eyes the rose-bush behind which he was concealed; that she might look down upon him and smile, smile, and allow a tender light to glisten in the eyes wherein a wistfully helpless one now abode.

With a little shrug of resolve he thrummed a tiny measure upon the guitar, thanking his stars that it was already tuned.

Like the touch of a moth-wing, his fingers fluttered over the strings, the throbbing strains keeping time to the beating of his own heart in the sweetest song the guitar has ever told—the love song of old Sicily, still to be heard in the silent streets of Sorrento of a night. And so much a part of the spirit of the night was it that the girl upon the balcony did not look startled, only glanced swiftly down, then was lulled to dreamy content by the rippling, passionate sincerity of the phrasing.

The song faded out and the serenader marked the swift rising and falling of her bosom. He waited, fearful lest she turn into the house, then swept boldly into the " Bedouin Love Song."

This time she made to go, but the splendid barytone of Stuart Duncan had held its mighty audiences, and now he was putting his very heart and soul into that voice, singing as he never had sung before, trying to hold one lonely girl. She waited, one hand upon the frame of the long French window.

". . . Let the night wind cool thy brow
With the heat of my burning sigh,
And my kisses shall teach thy lips
Of a love that ne'er can die."

The girl seemed to shrink away before the vibrant earnestness in the singer's voice underlying the words of

the song. Then she leaned forward again, eager and intent.

"Till the Sun grows cold,
And the Stars are old,
And the leaves of the Judgment Book unfold."

Far over the balcony rail she leaned, her eyes straining through the night, fastening finally upon the bush which concealed her troubadour. Stuart drank in the wondering delight in those eyes, hung upon the steady, undeviating look in them; then, impelled by her wordless command, he stepped into the open, advancing toward the balcony, hat in one hand, the guitar dangling from the other.

For a moment swift alarm rose to her face, then a rippling laugh burst from her lips, caught up by the echoes, and fondled, instead of mocked, by them.

"How perfectly funny!" she gasped finally.

"Isn't it — just," Duncan ruefully admitted, staring down at his guitar. He had not thought of the humor of the situation before, and, somehow, it disconcerted him. "And still," he added, "it didn't seem a bit funny when I planned it on the yacht. The night must have made me foolish."

He lifted his eyes to hers, holding them steadily, unwaveringly, trying to read there whether she was capable of understanding what he had to tell her; whether she would laugh at the romantic notion which had brought him all the way from New York.

To hear her laugh at him, he felt, would bring the very foundations of his being down about him in ruin and decay. He took a step closer, all the banter gone from his voice.

"And then perhaps the face of a girl leading a procession in a quaint pageant of Robidoux Island may have made me foolish," he said quickly. "Perhaps it may have walked across the screen of a motion-picture film in a little New York theater. Perhaps it may have turned the head of a man in the audience with its loveliness. Perhaps in the mad tumult of his heart at sight of that girl he may have thought that, from all the world, he had looked upon the one girl—the girl he was to love."

"Stop! Stop! You must not—" she pleaded, covering her face with her hands.

"But I will not stop until I have told you," he cried impulsively. "I am the man who saw that picture, and you looked into my eyes—out of that pageant on this island you looked into my eyes and, there in that New York theater, I looked into yours. And—and so I came to you. Your picture spoke to me of all the things I have dreamed about, fair lady. It spoke to me of one I never thought to see; it told me that the dreams of a boy were the realizations of a man.

"And—I came to you. And, all the way, I have been looking into your eyes. Every wave of the ocean speaks to me with your voice. The sighing of the wind at night is the calling of your voice to me. And—and so I came. My yacht is not a mile out. It brought me here that I might see you, tell you these things.

"I want you to know, when I tell you, that I am no fool—not a vain dreamer. I dream—I, who never thought to dream. And now I feel no more contempt of dreams or dreamers, for I know that dreams are but the deeds of a man who is awake. I looked upon your face, fair lady, and —I came—here."

She looked down at him, uncertain whether to fly within or remain. He was a very handsome young man—the man below her—and there was a deep sincerity of purpose in his eyes. His face and figure were ruggedly masculine, shrieking aloud against this serenade.

"I didn't know how to tell you, how to meet you," he plunged ahead. "I have a married couple aboard—bully pair!—but Kate called me a fool—because she didn't know. So I came here in a little dory, pulled myself to

the island here to let you know that there is some one you can depend on, some one you can trust to the end of the world, some one who asks nothing save that you permit him to be your servant. And that is why I came to-night."

"But it's all so impossible," she breathed. "The night—the moon has filled you with fancies—"

"On such a night Pgymalion stirred Galatea into life and love; on such a night Cyrano breathed out a love which broke his heart, yet gladdened it to know Roxane could feel its warmth; on such a night Leander swam the Hellespont.

"Call it the night, the moon—you who have enchanted the night for me—but do not speak of that within me which caused the night, the moon to stir my heart to such depths. I only wanted you—to know. And that is all—everything. I only wanted you to feel something of the love—"

She gave a little cry, a cry that caught in her throat and loosed itself in a pitiful helplessness. As he sprang forward she caught the lacy veil that cascaded from her hair and swept it before her face.

"But you must not—must be silent!" she cried. "To-night is my wedding night. To-night I am to be married. See! Can you not recognize the bridal costume?"

He staggered back as from a blow. Then it was no masquerade. As quickly he recovered himself at thought of the hour.

"But it is almost midnight," he protested.

"It is the custom of my house," she answered softly. "At midnight the women of the family are married."

One moment he stared at her, a stricken expression in his eyes, a leaden lump rising and falling in his throat. Then, bowing low, he started softly to retreat.

"I did not know—you must forgive me." His tones were dull, apathetic, monotonous. "I am very sorry, sorry to obtrude myself upon your happiness—"

"Happiness!" Her voice rang out in a bitter, almost hysterical laugh that had no mirth in it.

He looked up swiftly—looked, as she roughly drew the creamy satin sleeve high upon her beautifully rounded arms. Then he stepped back, an ejaculation of rage and horror bursting from his lips.

"Happiness!" she cried again. "You call marriage to such a man happiness? You think it happiness to marry one who demands his own happiness with brutal force? See these bruises, and think of the happiness of marriage to a man who thus gains a kiss!"

Duncan stared at her extended wrists, the wonderful texture of the pink and white flesh above and below them, then at the black and blue discolorations thereon—the marks of a strong man's fingers.

"God!"

"And to-night, of all nights, you come to offer aid," she continued, allowing the sleeves to fall back over the bruises. "To-night, just when the hour is too late, you come to me and tell me this wonderful story—to-night—too late—"

He paused a moment in his backward retreat, then shrugged his shoulders helplessly, unable to cope with the bewildering problem. The golden notes of her voice came to him, came to where he stood beside the rose-bush, stealing a last, lingering look at her.

"One song more, my Knight, my Troubadour," she called pleadingly, a lonely, sighing note in her voice that went to his heart. "One song more before you go away—taking with you my romance."

"A token from my lady fair," he called back, "and thy knight shall remain forever, happy beneath thy casement window."

"What shall the token be?" Evidently she had gained courage, for her voice rose bravely upon the night air.

"A rose I crave—a red, red rose that borrows color from my lady's lips, and still is shamed by their surpassing beauty. I crave a rose."

"Make the song one that shall soothe mine ears—" She stopped, for Duncan's voice was floating out upon the island, setting the echoes dancing.

"Come back, my Love, if love be love,
Across a thousand years.
If love be love, hope fails and dies,
And lies are truth and truths are lies;
There is no room for tears.
Come back, my Love, if love be love,
Across a thousand years."

Back from the rocks hurtled the last echo. The very air was still vibrant with the passionate yearning in his voice. He strained eagerly forward, eyes glued upon the erect figure of the girl standing upon the balcony, her slender hands uncertainly playing with the ribbon at her bodice.

Stuart watched her. Quite abruptly lights had begun to glow in the windows of the huge house. The diamonds disappeared, while dark shadows from the artificial light within threw black splotches upon the golden loveliness which the moon had given the place.

Here and there a dark figure appeared, fluttered across the blinds. Some giant hand tugged wretchedly at the serenader's heart-strings. The girl had told him the truth about her wedding. This midnight wakefulness testified to it.

Uncertainly she waited.

Then, with a swift, decisive motion, she took the red rose from her gown, held it a moment, pressed it lightly to her lips, brushed her cheeks against the less velvety petals; and, as she extended her arms, the rose fell lightly to the gravel, and she stepped inside the window, drawing the casements close behind her.

A splotch of red, it glowed against the ghostly whiteness of the walk. Stuart swiftly recovered it, holding it a moment in his hands, staring at it with the wondering amazement of a child, puzzled how anything could be so beautiful.

A tiny drop of dew nestled in the heart of it, and he looked about, but there was no dew upon the grass, and neither had the red, red rose of his lady touched the grass. And then he knew the dew for the purer tear that it really was.

And he looked up at the window and saw a hand upon the blinds; and a wrist was showing, too, and upon that wrist he had seen the blue and black discolorations that came from a man's hands being laid upon her in anger.

And Stuart Duncan passionately kissed away the tear from the heart of the rose before he moved away.

It was a very red, red rose, and red is the color of ardent passions, and red is the color of love, but red is the color of blood as well. And the girl upon the balcony had wept and carried marks of violence.

And he—Stuart Duncan—held in his hands the rose that bound him to her service.

Like one in a trance he returned slowly to the moon-bathed beach, and started launching the dory that had conveyed him to the scene of his romantic adventure. Then he hesitated.

For something was holding him back, sapping his strength so that he was unable to sweep the tiny craft from the calm harbor, nestling between the curling crescent's points.

Lights had been gleaming in the great house. Figures had been silhouetted against the windows. She was to be married at midnight, and midnight was upon the island now. She had flung him a rose, and she was to be a bride, was being made a bride now, perhaps.

It was a strange mood for Stuart Duncan.

Had he paused long enough for self-analysis he might have recognized this intangible emotion as the spark which ignites the flame of love. He might have set it down to indigestion, too much tobacco; for he knew nothing of

love at first hand. And never having been in love, he could not identify the symptoms of that delightfully distressing malady.

The tiny waves splashed on the glistening beach with tender cadence and gurgled back into the gleaming harbor.

A cool breeze, puffing across the slender island, brought him the refreshing odor, the tender melodies of the whispering pines. And then came another sound, the crunching of flying feet upon the sands, and there was the suggestion of fear in the sound. He turned abruptly.

It was the girl of the balcony running toward him.

He felt his heart leaping to his throat, choking him, as he took in the lissome grace of her, the curve of her slender neck, the expression of mingled relief and fear in her wonderful eyes, the parting of her lips, as her breath came fast from the violence of her exertion. Behind her, flattened upon the breeze, floated the gauzy veil of lace, and he noticed that she still was attired as he had seen her on the balcony.

Taking a forward step, he caught her in his arms, holding her there a moment, while she swayed uncertainly, her eyes closed, her heart beating tempestuously against his own. Then she drew away, a flush spreading over her face.

She studied his features, her eyes still steady and even, despite her obvious embarrassment. What she read there must have reassured her, for a smile drove away the blushes.

"The ceremony is over?" He could have bitten his tongue off immediately the question was out, so banal was it.

"I have come to you," she answered slowly, "for the help you offered me. You said you would help, came to me like the knights came to the imprisoned ladies of King Arthur's time; came when there did not seem to be any help in the world. I needed help, need help, sir. Will—will you take me to your yacht?"

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK. Don't forget this magazine is issued weekly, and that you will get the conclusion of this story without waiting a month.

WERE LOVE TO GO

By LaFayette Lentz Butler

WERE Love to go—to steal away in flight
And vanish in the star-mist, some bleak night—
Methinks, upon arising on the morn,
My heart would find wild chaos; lightning-torn
The sun which shimmers now so warm and bright.

The house wherein doth linger the gold light
Of something sweeter than the Sun-God's might
Would crumble to an emptiness forlorn,
Were Love to go!

The trees around would wither; yield the sight
Of wasted flowers, wildly dead from fright;
And swift the god of hate would wind his horn.
I dread to think what grief, what deadly scorn,
Would ravage souls of men, hell-driven quite,
Were Love to go.

THE MOTOR KUKLUX*

A SERIAL IN IV PARTS—PART II

BY HERBERT FLOWERDEW

Author of "The Villa Mystery"

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS

A NUMBER of London automobile clubs receive typewritten letters headed "The League of Personal Safety," warning them that the death penalty will be exacted from the driver of any description of automobile who runs over and kills any person. They treat these letters as a joke—dubbing the L. P. S. the Motor Kuklux—until several drivers are shot dead. Sir Julian Daymont, a novelist, secures one of the Kuklux epistles and sends for Joanna Somerset, another writer, to help him run down the murderers. He discovers that the letter was written on Joanna's portable typewriter. Joanna suspects one Wilmott Milldane, who recently occupied lodgings over hers, or Jack Yemmerde, an admirer, of knowing something about it. Jack clears himself while out motoring with Joanna the following day. At Wimbleby Hollow their car strikes a tramp named Griggs, crushing his ankle. Joanna, who is driving, is knocked unconscious. Jack proposes to her after she revives, and is accepted. The next day he is summoned to Mendelstone Towers, the home of his grandfather, Colonel Jacob Yemmerde, whose property he expects to inherit. The colonel introduces Jack to Olga Crewen, a wealthy Jewess he wishes him to marry. Upon learning that Jack is engaged to Joanna, the old man turns him out.

CHAPTER VIII.

Mysterious Telegrams.

THE heavy smoker who has taken a vow against tobacco can view his deprivation with complacency while he is enjoying his last farewell cigar, and with much the same species of complacency Jack Yemmerde traveled up to town in very good spirits.

The fact that in a twenty minutes' conversation he had changed the current of his life gave him that sense of pleasurable excitement which serves as a temporary anesthetic to the victims of most tragedies.

The rupture with his grandfather meant that he must give up a very pleasant life in London and begin a struggle for the necessities of existence instead of idly enjoying its luxuries; but the prospect of hardship and effort was rather romantically pleasant, as it usually is to a healthy young man who has not tried it.

At Mendelstone station, where either by luck or Machiavellian prevision on his grandfather's part he arrived just in time to catch one of the rare local trains to Newmarket, he had considered half humorously the idea whether he ought not to travel third-class; but the station-master, who had seen him coming and held the train for him, had his customary first-class ticket to Town ready, and to Jack the idea of beginning already to count his pence appeared almost as melodramatic as his dismissal.

The tragedy of the business, he told himself, was that he would have to leave Joanna, uncertain whether he would ever win the right to make her

* This story began in The Cavalier for March 7.

his wife, and even this grief was kept on the intellectual plane, in which grief is sentimental and pleasant, by the fact that he was traveling at the moment direct to Joanna; and that, since it would take some time to settle his affairs and prepare for emigration, the meeting would not be their last.

He had promised to send her instant news if anything of importance transpired when he met his grandfather, and congratulated himself that the abruptness of his dismissal at least enabled him to carry her the news in person.

It was still early evening when he reached Liverpool Street and jumped into a taxi to drive direct to South Kensington.

He found Joanna dictating to a plain young woman with spectacles, whom she introduced as Miss Mary Collins, an art student, living in the house. It appeared that Miss Collins was a devout admirer of her stories and had long been thirsting to do her some service. Seizing her opportunity now, she had made herself invaluable, not only by helping her to dress, but by manipulating her typewriter for her with some knowledge and expertness.

Joanna declared that they had got through quite a lot of work together.

As for her wrist, but for the discomfort of having only one hand she would have forgotten that it was hurt, and, although she had kept a promise to Jack by calling in a Kensington doctor, he had not thought it necessary to remove the bandages.

"You have brought bad news," she said, her soft voice full of solicitude as soon as the devoted Miss Collins left them alone together.

Jack smiled ruefully.

"The worst, dear. Do you know of anybody who wants to engage a steady young chauffeur?"

"You do not mean that your grandfather has actually—"

"Cut me off *without* a shilling. So you behold me a penniless nobody."

"Oh, but you can't be — it sha'n't be!" she said hotly. "If your grandfather objects to me so strongly, you must tell him that you will never see me again. I could not bear to think that you were disinherited through me."

Jack's face still wore its rueful smile.

"Oh! you need not feel any qualms. Your guess that the old man had selected a wife for me was nearer the mark than I thought. The lady has been selected and — I imagine, although I may do her an injustice — has expressed her willingness to take me. So I was offered the choice at the point of the bayonet of presenting myself as a suitor for Miss Crewen's hand or earning my own living. I decided, of course, to earn my own living."

Joanna caught at the name.

"Not Lady Crewen's daughter?"

"That is the lady. She claims to have met me once or twice in town, although I do not remember seeing her. You do?"

Joanna nodded and was silent for a moment. But she was very courageous.

"Yes, she is quite young and pretty; don't you think that you might care for her?"

Jack laughed, with a note of irritation in the laugh.

"Don't be silly."

"Well, don't you think you might have cared for her if you had not met me?"

He made a show of weighing the question gravely.

"From an examination of the impression Miss Crewen made on me this afternoon, I should say that she is about the last girl I should have thought of marrying if I had been quite heart-whole."

"She is an heiress," said Joanna. "Love is not the only thing in the world."

"I know it is not," Jack retorted. "There is such a thing as self-respect,

and I should lose mine entirely if I allowed the Colonel to dispose of me to the highest bidder, like a parcel of land. So that is settled, and my allowance and prospects of inheriting the Colonel's money are definitely ended.

"I should not care a toss—there is something rather jolly in the idea that one is dependent on one's own exertions for one's bread—if it were not that it means leaving *you*. That is where the confounded old despot gets the laugh on me. I can block his plans, but he can block my hopes."

"But why should you leave me?" she asked with quiet persuasion in her soft voice, although her face had gone white. "If your hopes from your grandfather are absolutely over and done with, why should you leave me?"

"For a hundred reasons," he said; "the first of which is that I am going to the Colonies. There is an idea, I think it is true, that a fellow can get on there if he works hard. Here it depends whether one is in the right rut, and I am in the wrong rut. I am not sure yet whether I shall go to South America or Rhodesia.

"I know men who can tell me about both places, and I shall try and see them to-morrow. And a good deal depends on whether I have any capital. I am going to tot up my accounts to-night and find out whether I am likely to have anything on the right side when I have sold my assets and settled up."

Joanna's cheeks turned from white to scarlet.

"I have no objection to going to the Colonies, too," she said. "I could write my things just as well in South America or Rhodesia, and do business with the editors and publishers by post."

Jack drew his breath and laughed mirthlessly.

"And keep me on the proceeds if I turned out a failure," he said bitterly. "No, darling; I have to earn a man's money before I can take a man's reward. And while I am seeing whether I can do it you must just forget that I am in existence. Otherwise I shall never forgive myself for letting you know what I feel. I want to leave you quite free. If I succeed I shall come back. If I fail I should like to think that you have forgotten me."

She looked up at him pathetically as he strode the floor.

"And I suppose that is why you have not kissed me," she said.

It was late when Jack got home to his chambers. After leaving Joanna, cheerful in the knowledge that they would meet again on the morrow, even while the prospect of the long parting to come made their "good-by" kiss a long and intense one, he had dined at his club and managed to get a long talk with Conroy, who had made his money in Peru, and, like so many men under similar circumstances, imagined that his success could never be repeated in the same country.

He strongly advised Jack to go to Rhodesia, of which his knowledge was nil, and made an offer for the new Mercedes. Intent on losing no time, Jack had dropped in at another club in hopes of finding the man who could tell him about Rhodesia, but without success; and it was close upon eleven when he reached the Temple to find Walker, his man, rather anxious about him, and considerably relieved by his appearance.

Since as early as six o'clock in the evening a succession of telegrams had been arriving at his chambers from Mendelstone.

The first two or three had been addressed to Jack himself and lay unopened on his table. The rest had been sent to Walker, and had been calculated to make him a little uneasy.

Had Mr. Yemmerde returned from Mendelstone? Reply paid.

Had Mr. Yemmerde given him any idea of his plans when he left for Mendelstone? Reply paid.

Had Walker any idea where Mr. Yemmerde was likely to be, seeing that he had left Mendelstone and had not returned to the Temple? Reply paid.

And so on. They were all sent apparently by the Marquis.

Jack tore open his own telegrams and gathered from their rather incoherent messages that his grandfather had been injured in an accident; that he was asking for his grandson and could not understand why he had left him; that Jack's disappearance was a puzzle to everybody since his luggage remained at the Towers, and that it was of the utmost importance that the Colonel's mind should be set at rest about him.

He was begged to come home at once.

Jack drew in his breath as he read. His grandfather was asking for him, and he could not understand why he had left him. What could it mean except that the old man had relented and wished him to understand that the quarrel of the afternoon was to be forgotten?

In a rush of relief, all the more vivid because he was not absolutely certain that it was justified, he realized that he had been playing a part to himself when he pretended that it was rather a pleasant thing to be disinherited.

If it was true—and what else could the message mean? — that his grandfather had been softened by illness—and none of the telegrams gave him any idea whether the injury the old man had sustained was serious or not —and wished to act fairly toward him, what a difference it would make to him and to Joanna.

The earliest train by which he could get back to Mendelstone did not start till eight in the morning. It exasperated him to think that he could have caught the night express if he had not wasted time at the clubs, trying to pick up information about South America and Rhodesia. The thought of either place was hateful, now that he had caught a vision of his marriage to Joanna made possible and Joanna assisting him in the career that would open out for him at the bar if he could only wait long enough.

But there was no actual need for haste except to set the Colonel's mind at rest, and he scribbled out a telegram, and sent his man to Charing Cross with it.

And then he sat down and wrote a long letter to Joanna.

In his telegram he had, besides announcing his train, asked for more concise news of the Colonel's accident. But no answer had arrived when he left his chambers for Liverpool Street in the morning.

The more concise information as to the Colonel's accident which he had asked for was supplied, however, by the first newspaper he opened in the train.

It appeared that a few minutes after his grandfather had left, so far as he could judge, on the previous afternoon, his motor-car had collided with the high gig of a horse-breaker at the bottom of Mendelstone Hill, and within half a mile of the Towers. The horse-breaker had been killed, to all appearances instantaneously, the horse had been injured so seriously that it had to be destroyed, and the Colonel had been thrown from his car and rendered unconscious.

According to the West End *Gazette*, which was pandering to the public interest in the "Kuklux" by reporting motor accidents at length, the Colonel had recovered consciousness shortly after reaching the Towers, but had been unable to give any explanation of the accident.

CHAPTER IX.

The Colonel's Accident.

JACK was glad to find the Marquis awaiting him at Mendelstone station. The chief fear in his mind as

he traveled down was that he had after all been summoned home without his grandfather's knowledge, and that the old man would refuse to see him when he arrived.

He wanted nothing so much as definite information on the point before he presented himself.

The Marquis, who, although his thin aristocratic face with its ivory complexion never betrayed any sign of his excesses, looked very shaky and tremulous in the morning sunshine, had driven over from the Towers for him in a hired fly. The motor-car, which had come through the accident practically uninjured, was in the hands of the police pending the coroner's inquiry, fixed for the afternoon.

"This is terrible, is it not, my dear Jacques?" said the Frenchman as they met, and although it was so early in the day he had already lapsed into his own language.

Jack looked at him with startled apprehension. He had quite accepted the verdict of the newspapers he had read in the train that his grandfather's injuries were not of a serious character.

"He is seriously hurt?" he asked anxiously, and the Marquis shook his head.

"But no, he is a wonderful man, he is made of iron. He was thrown on his head—they believe that he was thrown on his head. For four hours he lay unconscious like one dead. And to-day he remains in bed only because the doctors insist. He would do everything as usual, and to-morrow he will rise, he says, and play no more at being a sick man, let the doctors say what they will. And in a week from to-day, if the inquest finishes this afternoon, he will be dead. It is terrible, is it not?"

Jack stared at him.

"The doctors think he will die?"

The Marquis threw out his hands.

"The doctors? No, they speak only of a slight concussion against which it is necessary to be careful, which requires that he should rest. But this League of Personal Safety: they will kill him certainly, when it is shown at the inquest that he killed a man with his automobile. It is terrible. I cannot sleep for terror of it. Not one has escaped them, and the journals have printed the accident large for all the world to see."

Jack could not help smiling at his excitement. The terrors of the "Motor Kuklux" had failed to grip his imagination, and he had not even thought of it in connection with his grandfather's accident.

"I bet that the League won't kill the Colonel as long as I am here to keep an eye on him," he said with characteristic confidence in his ability to perform a set duty satisfactorily. "But has he really asked you to send for me? Is he expecting me?"

The Marquis threw out his hands.

"He is anxious for nothing so much. His first words when he recovered consciousness were: 'Where is Jack?' It was most distressing when we could not tell him. Everybody thought you were with him in his motor-car, and they actually went back to search the scene of the accident in case you had been thrown into the ditch at the side of the road and remained there unnoticed. Why *did* you return to town so suddenly?"

"Did not the Colonel tell you?" Jack asked drily.

"He knows no more than the rest of us," said the Marquis energetically. "It is a mystery to us. You drove him over to Eggott Priory to lunch, but instead of returning with him we found, after making inquiries for you everywhere, that you had caught the four o'clock train to town in a hurry.

"The Colonel fancies that you must have suddenly remembered some important appointment and left him at the top of the hill, thinking you would get to the station more quickly on foot than by going all the way round by the road in the car. Was that it?"

"Yes, that was about what hap-

pened," said Jack, smiling to himself at his grandfather's paraphrase of their actual parting.

Nothing, he told himself, could offer better proof that he was forgiven than the fact that his grandfather had invented a reason for his absence rather than mention their quarrel.

He dare not assume himself that all danger of disinheritance was at an end. A man as abrupt in his moods as he was self-willed and arbitrary would require delicate handling, but if after his declaration that he would marry Joanna or nobody, the old man had taken him back into favor, Jack told himself that it would be strange if he did not win the Colonel's complete approval of the marriage.

He felt very easy in his mind as they reached the house, and he ran up at once to the sick-room.

It was the first occasion on which he had known his grandfather invalided even for a day, and the sight of him in an unfamiliar pose appealing to his sympathy combined with a sense of gratitude to make him feel a nearer approach to real affection for the old man than he had ever before been conscious of.

For the first time in his life it occurred to him that the dispenser of his fate, as he had called Colonel Yemmerde, had a heart as well as a will, when their hands met.

"I am glad to see you, Jack," he said. "We have been quite anxious about you, till your wire came. It did not get through till this morning. You had to go back to town in a hurry, they tell me. I hope I have not brought you away from anything important. Not a brief?"

Jack smiled.

"No, sir, the brief has not turned up yet."

His grandfather smiled in answer.

"Oh! I think it will. I have something to tell you on that score when we have got this accident settled. That is what is worrying me. The inquest on poor Gibson is coming on at three and they will try and make out that I killed him through some insane mismanagement of the car that would prove me either mad or drunk.

"I am certain that it was Gibson's own fault, unless something went diametrically wrong with the machinery of the car. They say the machinery is all right, but I want you to examine it. You know all about it. And I want you to appear for me at the inquiry. Lovelock is supposed to be watching the case in my interests, but they tell me that he is confined to the house by gout, and can only send a clerk, and I don't know another lawyer I can trust.

"So I am depending on you, my boy. You've got to get at the truth of the matter. If I made a mistake for the first time in my life, I'll pension Gibson's widow handsomely, but if it was his fault, as I am sure it was, well! she ought to pay my doctor's bill, and may think me generous that I do not insist on it. You have heard, of course, how the evidence goes?"

"I am afraid I know nothing except what is in the newspapers," said Jack apologetically. "I have seen nobody but Uncle Claude, and he had not time to tell me anything in detail. How did the accident happen?"

The old man raised himself on an elbow, his lined face full of excitement.

"Nobody knows. Nobody actually saw it, although Quizzledick — you know Quizzledick, the new head-constable, reckons to have been on the scene within a few minutes of the actual collision. It is his story that puts me in the wrong. He swears that the track of the car and of Gibson's gig were shown clearly in the dust on the road, and that while Gibson was absolutely on his right side, I shot across at him almost at a right angle, as if I had deliberately made a run at him."

Jack nodded.

"And how did it happen, really, sir? What is your account?"

"I have not got the ghost of one. That is the exasperating thing about it. They seem to think it is a natural and ordinary result of the shock, and a nasty knock I seemed to have had on the head—I was unconscious for four hours—but I cannot even recollect driving the car at all. I know that we started out yesterday for Eggott, and I have some sort of vague remembrance of being there.

"We had lunch at the Priory, hadn't we, and you met Lady Crewen and her daughter, but when I try to recall the journey home, I can't fix anything. I cannot remember you leaving me to keep this appointment in town. I cannot remotely remember taking the wheel, much less can I remember meeting Gibson's gig.

"That is one of the reasons why I was so impatient to have you home. It may all come back to me, if you remind me bit by bit of what happened exactly up to the point when you left me. It must have been within a few minutes of the accident."

Jack felt a cold chill run down his spine. Yesterday he had thought it startling to find himself disinherited as the result of a twenty minutes' conversation.

Now he saw himself disinherited afresh in a single sentence. For his grandfather had not forgiven him, he had not retreated a step from his determination to choose a wife for him or cut him adrift.

His amiability meant only that he had forgotten entirely that they had quarreled, and that Jack had refused to consider the wife selected for him.

"If the inquest is coming on at three, sir," he said, controlling his voice, "I should like to have a look at the car at once. It is an old machine, and is wearing out, and if a cog in the steering-gear slipped, it would account for the whole business. Where is the car?"

"Oh! it is in the garage as usual," said the Colonel, "but I believe you will find a policeman guarding it. Come back as soon as you have overhauled it. I have a lot to talk over with you, and a lot to ask you."

As he escaped from the room he felt that he must have a few minutes alone to consider the new disturbing position, and decide on his own course of action—Jack was waylaid by his uncle, who was not in a fit state to show himself to his patron.

"Have you enabled him to recall anything of the accident?" the marquis asked eagerly in French, and Jack shook his head.

"I haven't had much time, so far," he said. "I have been hearing about the accident and am going to examine the car."

The Marquis linked his arm in his to accompany him.

"Do you think his memory will all come back?" he asked. "He is very anxious that it should."

"That, I suppose, is a question for the doctors," said Jack.

Jack's own private opinion was that a couple of sentences from him would enable the Colonel to remember a great deal. He had only to tell him that he had refused to be a suitor for the hand of Miss Crewen; he had only to mention Joanna, and the whole quarrel would surely come back to his mind.

And if his grandfather remembered their parting, it was quite probable that his memory would run on to the scene that followed so quickly after it. But he did not say so. Almost automatically he had decided that he was not going to revive the old man's memory.

Not that he could hope to gain much by silence. If the scene of the previous afternoon had been wiped permanently from the Colonel's mind it meant only that it would be repeated. His grandfather would ask him to marry Olga Crewen, and he would refuse, and in all probability be turned out neck and crop as drastically as before, but he saw no reason why he should precipitate matters.

When he went back to the sick-room

to report that there was certainly nothing in the car's machinery to explain the accident, he was well on his guard against any question his grandfather could ask him.

At the inquest in the afternoon he felt that he acquitted himself with decent success. Since all the evidence respecting the position of the gig and car when the Police Superintendent arrived at the scene of the accident tended to prove that the motor-car had been entirely at fault, he directed all his efforts to getting the inquiry postponed until the Colonel was able to attend.

He pointed out in a quite moving little speech that for a man who had never made a mistake in driving in his life it would be a very painful thing if any impression was left from the inquiry that his driving was in any way responsible for the deplorable accident, and a very unfair thing if that impression was given in his absence and merely because a temporary lapse of memory due to the accident prevented him giving evidence which might have entirely removed it.

The plea, although it failed in its immediate purpose, succeeded better than he had hoped.

The Coroner pointed out to his jury that they were quite entitled to ask for an adjournment if they thought it necessary, but since the only additional evidence they could hope for was that of Colonel Yemmerde, and they had medical evidence that he would probably never remember anything about the accident, there could be no harm in their giving a verdict which left no reflection on the Colonel which his evidence might show to be undeserved. They had evidence that the Colonel was a capable and careful motorist.

Even if they could accept the purely circumstantial evidence that his car swerved abruptly to the wrong side of the road, it was quite possible that it might be accounted for by a sudden giddiness or illness on the Colonel's part. Under his guidance the jury promptly decided that Gibson's death was accidental and that there was not sufficient evidence to show how the accident had occurred.

Jack thought it quite satisfactory, and when he returned home with the news was surprised to find that it made the Colonel angry.

"So I am labeled for the rest of my days as an old dotard who is liable to run anybody down that I meet on the road in a fit of giddiness," he said bitterly. "Well, it can't stop there. I'll never rest until I have remembered what that fool, Gibson, really did to get himself killed, and you shall help me, Jack. As soon as I can get out we'll reconstruct the whole business, from the time we left Eggott together."

CHAPTER X.

The Kuklux Sends a Warning.

BY the afternoon post on the day following the inquest Colonel Yemmerde received the formal intimation of the League of Personal Safety that he had been condemned to death for the murder of Gibson, and that his execution would be carried out within seven days.

The Colonel had dressed without assistance and come down to breakfast at his usual hour determined to carry out the "reconstruction" of the accident without delay.

The suggestion of his doctor that, if he repeated his drive from Eggott as nearly as possible under the same circumstances as on the day of disaster, it might set in motion some train of thought which, continued, would bring back to the mind all the incidents of the day, had taken all the stronger hold on his imagination because it seemed the only means by which the exact details of the accident ever *could* be ascertained now.

Dr. Copper, a very modern young practitioner who had recently bought a very old-fashioned practise, and be-

come medical adviser at the Towers, had talked very scientifically about the association of ideas with places, citing cases from his own experience when the sight of a place revisited after many years had brought back instantly thoughts associated with it which had lain through the many years dormant and forgotten.

One must produce professional information of some sort for a patient who refuses to be alarmed when he is told that he is suffering from concussion of the brain, or to feel, or be persuaded that he feels, any of the ordinary disabilities which he ought to be experiencing.

When Jack, feeling somewhat of a hypocrite, urged the Colonel to put off the "reconstruction" until his recovery was more assured, and cited Dr. Copper's dicta about quietude and rest, the Colonel also quoted the doctor on the "evanescence of unregistered impressions."

"Copper says that every day of delay is likely to blur the memory of what happened, if I do get it back," he said, "and I should not put it off if my head were twice as bad."

Considerably to Jack's relief, the old man was not proposing to carry out his reconstruction to the point of visiting the Priory. They were to drive out to Eggott and back after lunch, and it was just as the old "two-seater," looking more disreputable than ever after the accident, was being brought round to the door that the redoubtable post-card arrived.

The Colonel, who happened to be standing in the portico waiting for the car, took it himself with a little batch of letters from the postman's hand, and after puzzling over it blankly for half a minute realized what it was.

He gave a little, hard laugh and handed it to his grandson.

"What do you think of this piece of effrontery, Jack?"

To Jack it appeared serious enough to make him change color. He had been unable to believe in the existence of a secret society so widespread and far-reaching that no fatality due to a motor-car in any part of the country could escape its attention.

He took it, without having given much thought to the matter, that the five victims of the "Motor Kuklux" were merely representatives of a considerable number against whom the enmity of the League might have been directed. He had not expected the League to direct its attention to his grandfather, and had smiled at the veritable panic in which his uncle appeared to be on account of the Kuklux from the moment of the accident.

But it was a different thing to know that the mysterious League *had* singled out his grandfather, and he did not think of minimizing the gravity of the position.

"This is very serious, sir," he said. "The police ought to be communicated with at once, and for the next week it would be safer for you not to leave the house. I am afraid that we shall have to give up our run to Eggott. It would not be safe without a police escort."

"If you think a blackguardly set of cutthroats is going to dictate to me where I shall go and what I shall do, you are very much mistaken, my boy," his grandfather replied hotly. "I should have thought you knew me better. You were joking, I hope, when you spoke of a police escort to Eggott. A fine fool I should look going about with a ring of policemen round me. If you are afraid, you can stay at home. I dare say I shall remember what happened on Wednesday all the better if I go over the ground alone. You can please yourself, but I am certainly going to Eggott this afternoon."

"If you do I shall accompany you, sir," said Jack. "You know, of course, that I was not thinking of my own safety, and you would simply be playing into the hands of the murderers if you took the journey alone. But if you object to having Quizzledick and some of his men on the lookout—I

was never so far from joking in my life—I should prefer to carry a revolver.

"We know very well from the papers that the man or men you are likely to find waiting for you behind some hedge will have one, and if one is to be shot at it is more satisfactory to know that one can shoot back. I believe Uncle Claude can lend me one. I'll ask him."

He hurried away in quest of the weapon without waiting for the Colonel to acquiesce. The Marquis, who was sitting up in bed in an ancient but exquisite dressing-jacket, greeted him anxiously.

"You are not back already?" he asked, for Jack had promised to report the result of the "reconstruction" as soon as they returned from their drive.

"No, we are just starting," said Jack briskly. "I came up to ask if you can lend me a revolver. Mine is unfortunately at my chambers, but you have an old dueling-set, haven't you? One of those will serve if you have any cartridges for it."

The Marquis's whole body quivered with apprehensive excitement at the request. He seemed to realize in an instant what it meant.

"It has come, then," he exclaimed. "By Heaven, I knew that it would come, although you laughed at me. But surely he will not go out in the automobile. It is simply to throw himself into the hands of the avengers."

"That is what I told him," said Jack. "But you know what the Colonel is. You can't reason with him, because he does not reason. He simply decides that nothing can happen that he does not want to happen. I really believe that he thinks he was not killed in the accident simply because he decided not to be killed or to allow the knock on the head to affect him. But hurry up with the revolver, or he will be starting without me, and if anybody is going to pop at him I want to have my pop in return. You have got cartridges?"

The Marquis was already out of bed, and had crossed the floor somewhat unsteadily to unlock a handsome old-fashioned carved escritoire. It was one of the few pieces of his own furniture that he had brought to the Towers.

The dainty dueling set, a couple of exquisitely chased twin revolvers in a satin-lined case, was a purchase he had made in Paris during his honeymoon, a characteristic honeymoon in which he had spent his money so lavishly that he had been obliged to cable to his new father-in-law for means to return.

"They are not really old," he said, with mild pathetic reproach in his voice as he opened the case lovingly. "The revolvers were of the very latest pattern when I bought them. And here is the ammunition. My life has been very prosaic. I have not had occasion to use the revolvers ever."

A servant knocked at the door as he spoke, with an impatient message for Jack from his grandfather. Unless he came down at once the car would start without him.

Jack seized one of the revolvers and a handful of cartridges, and got down just in time to prevent the old man carrying out his threat.

"I must say that I think you are unwise, sir," he protested courageously as he jumped on the car, already on the move. "If you were the first person to receive the warning you have just had I could understand you ignoring it with contempt. I should do it myself. But that is just what young Wentworth did, and he got shot. We know now that the post-card means what it says.

"Somebody, who may be hiding behind that shrubbery at the present moment, is going to try and take your life, and Uncle Claude agrees with me that you are playing direct into that somebody's hands by driving out like this unprotected. You give them all the advantage: a road practically deserted, and ideal cover in the woods when we pass, not to mention miles of

hedgerow. I've got a revolver, it is true"—he was loading its six chambers as he spoke—"but what protection is there in that?

"If a shot came from behind that hedge"—they had just turned out of the gates into the open road, the Colonel taking the turn sharply, as was his wont—"I shall shoot back, and I can promise you, sir, that if you are shot I'll avenge you or get shot myself, but that would be too late to be of any benefit to you."

The car pulled up with a jerk.

"If you are nervous you need not come, as I told you," said the Colonel, his voice deliberate and biting. "But so far as I am concerned, I'd rather be shot dead than allow a blackguardedly gang of ruffians to dictate to me what I shall do or where I shall go. You can please yourself, but my life is my own, and if these blackguards kill me, *you* won't suffer. You'll be master at the Towers a little sooner, that is all."

"I admire your courage, sir," said Jack very sincerely. "For myself I am not nervous. I was only concerned about you, and as your mind is made up—please start the car."

He had never come nearer to seeing his grandfather in the somewhat heroic light in which the old man saw himself, and admiring even his domineering self-will, and it made him all the more human and sympathetic in his eyes to find that the acknowledgment of his courage pleased and mollified him.

"I do not think there is much cowardice in the Yemmerdes," said the old man, as he started the car, "and if there is any danger I ask for no better escort than you, my boy. Between us I think we ought to give a good account of ourselves to any skulking villain who tries to carry out the threat of that post-card; what do you think, Jack?"

Jack smiled.

The excitement of it stirred his blood, as he sat at the side of the warned man watching keenly the hedge on the one side of the road and the fringe of the Mendelstone Woods on the other, conscious that the atmosphere of possible tragedy in the air had affected his grandfather and drawn them closer than they had ever been.

"Your mention of Sarvonne reminds me," said the Colonel, "of something I wanted to say to you, in case anything happens to me. In my will, which was made three or four years ago, I have directed you to make your uncle a quarterly allowance sufficient for his needs if you do not care to keep him with you at the Towers.

"I am afraid, though, that if he were given complete liberty he would only make use of it to drink himself to death, and although it would not be fair to you to saddle you with the care of him by a hard and fast provision I should like you to understand that I should like you to keep him with you, and do your best to protect him against himself, if you possibly can. I can quite see that he might make it impossible.

"He has tried my patience a great deal of late, and his outbreaks would be more disturbing still when you have a wife and young children. I ought to have made his allowance dependent on your pleasure, so that you would have a hold on him and threaten him with the workhouse as I have to do sometimes. But when I drew up the will I expected pretty confidently to remain above ground considerably longer than poor Sarvonne, despite the twelve years he has to the good, and I expect so still."

His voice changed abruptly as he drew himself up and expanded his chest like a man shaking off a momentary weakness.

"Well! it shall not be my fault if you don't, sir," said Jack with responsive cheerfulness, and the old man smiled with something that was almost affection in his eyes.

"You are a good fellow, Jack," he said, "and when my time comes, I don't think I could leave the Towers in better hands. I confess that I should like to live a little longer: I should like to know that you were suitably married, and to see a child of yours before I go. It is a man's marriage that is the turning point in his life, and I have something to say to you about that when I get my mind settled about this matter of the accident."

The reminder fell like a cold douche on Jack's mood. For a little while in the excitement of a new danger he had forgotten that he was practically a disinherited outcast, enjoying his grandfather's confidence only by an accident, by a loss of memory on the old man's part which at any moment the drive might bring back.

They were mounting Mendelstone Hill and as they rounded the curve and came in sight of the finger-post pointing the way to the railway-station, he drew in his breath. To his own mind it brought back a vivid picture of the moment when he had found himself disinherited.

If there was anything in Dr. Copper's theory, it must surely bring back to his companion's mind some recollection of the angry scene that had taken place there.

The car had come to a standstill as usual at the last little steep bit of the ascent, and Jack got out to give it a helping hand behind, his revolver still in his right hand, and his eyes alert for any sign of movement at either side of the road.

They advanced toward the finger-post at a walking rate. But they reached and passed it safely. Colonel Yemmerde, who had remained in the car, gave no sign of recollection, and Jack was mounting to his side again when a smart-looking car driven by a man in green livery came round the turn from Eggott, and pulled up at the sight of them.

Jack cursed his luck as he recognized its occupants. Lady Crewen and her daughter were the last people he wanted his grandfather to meet during the "reconstruction."

CHAPTER XI.

Disinherited Again.

WHENEVER Jack had asked himself how he could take the best advantage of his grandfather's fortunate loss of memory and avoid a repetition of their violent and complete rupture, he had told himself that his first step must be to see the Crewens before the Colonel met them again.

The first thought that suggested itself was that he might throw himself upon their good-nature, and tell them the whole position. Ordinarily decent people, if told the whole story, would allow it to seem that negotiations had broken off on their side and save him from the necessity of losing his inheritance by refusing to consider them.

But the more he thought of Lady Crewen, and the more he thought of Miss Crewen, the less prudent did it seem to throw himself upon the good-nature of such people. Miss Olga was sure to be spiteful and vindictive, even if her mother was too clever and calculating a woman to waste time on profitless resentment.

An alternative plan was to do his best to counteract the favorable impression he had made on the two ladies, to show himself hostile and unfriendly, and arrive if possible at the point of "strained relations" before the Colonel saw them together again. It had been a fatal mistake on his part to be politely gallant to the girl and allow her to pin a rose in his coat for the Colonel to see.

If he was given another chance of handling the same position with his eyes open to the plot against him, his grandfather should have no excuse for contemplating his marriage to Olga Crewen as anything but a cold-blooded bargain without any possibility of romance on his part.

In theory his course was quite clear,

although he realized that there might be difficulties in putting his plan into practise. And now by the freak of fate he was compelled to meet Lady Crewen and her daughter under his grandfather's eyes before he had done anything.

There was no avoiding the meeting. Lady Crewen had sprung from the car, with surprising agility for such a fat little woman in such a tight little fashionable dress, and rushed at the Colonel with voluble congratulations.

They were driving over to make inquiries, and she was delighted to find dear Colonel Yemmerde looking so wonderfully well after his terrible accident. Strangely enough, when the accident happened within a few miles of the Priory, she had heard of it only in Town. Olga and she had spent the previous day there, and had started without hearing a word of what had taken place.

She ran on volubly with her flattering air of complete solicitude, which left it to be inferred that if she had heard earlier of the accident she would have given up all the engagements of a crowded day in London to make inquiry after his welfare.

Jack, standing by in the road, was interested less by her cleverness than by the fact that his grandfather was wholly pleased and flattered by it.

It was some moments before Lady Crewen could take her attention from the Colonel sufficiently to acknowledge his presence.

"How fortunate for dear Colonel Yemmerde that you were here to watch over his interests," she said. "We have just been reading what you said at the inquest, and it seemed to us quite splendid. I shall draw my brother's attention to it. Olga thought it magnificent, and is anxious to congratulate you. Do go and talk to her. I told her not to get out, because she is really worn out after our busy day. But she insisted on coming with me, in the hope that she might see you, and congratulate you on your speech."

Olga was looking at him with languorous inviting eyes from the resplendent car.

"I am afraid I shall have to give Miss Crewen a rather divided attention," he said with a significant glance at the revolver in his hand. "The Colonel has just received a polite intimation from the League of Personal Safety that his execution has been decided upon."

Lady Crewen was very properly shocked.

"What infamous effrontery," she exclaimed, and made Jack wonder whether it was only by chance that she echoed his grandfather's own word, or whether she could actually be clever enough to guess instantly the primary aspect in which the threat of the Motor Kuklux would present itself to a man like the Colonel. "For Heaven's sake do not tell Olga," she added in the same breath. "The very mention of this horrible society terrifies her, poor child. Do go and talk to her, or she will be joining us and hearing us discuss it."

Afterward Jack told himself that he was very stupid to obey her. He ought to have realized that Lady Crewen was a very clever woman and might not desire him to talk to her daughter so much as she desired to talk to the Colonel alone, which was the last thing he should have allowed her to do.

But the habit of courtesy is hard to break, and he strolled across to the Crewen's car. Miss Olga leaning back against its luxurious cushions with the air of an invalid, held out her hand.

"I have been dying to see you," she said, and Jack raised his eyebrows.

"Indeed?" he said, his tone tolerant rather than interested.

"Yes, I was in Town yesterday with the Mater, and I heard such a strange tale about you. I have been dying to ask you whether it is true."

"This is exciting," he said, and he was no longer uninterested, although he pretended to be, and kept his voice indifferent. "And what have you heard?"

"Oh, it is very absurd," she smiled, "but a man we met at dinner assured the Mater seriously that you were going to emigrate to Rhodesia and selling your new motor car to pay for your passage. Wasn't it ridiculous?"

Jack winced inwardly, but would have died sooner than show it. He had been vaguely trying to find a word for Miss Crewen's smile, and found it abruptly. It was malicious.

"Very," he said with a laugh that sounded quite natural. "What absurd stories one does hear. You contradicted it, I hope?"

"Mater did, but the man—a Mr. Conroy—assured us that you asked him personally to make an offer for the car on Wednesday. Isn't it true?"

Jack laughed.

"I have no intention of selling the Mercedes or emigrating at present. What do *you* think?"

He glanced apprehensively as he spoke to where Lady Crewen and his uncle were talking together in low, earnest tones, that did not permit him to catch a word. He did not think of denying to himself that it was a bombshell his companion had more or less consciously exploded upon him.

Nothing could be more menacing.

Lady Crewen was a very clever woman, as capable as anybody of putting two and two together, and by a coincidence as remarkable as it was unfortunate she had met the one man in London with whom he had discussed his intention of emigrating. For her it would be child's play to find the connecting link between that intention and their conversation two days earlier at the Priory when he had been looking forward to earning distinction at the Bar under her brother's auspices.

Lady Crewen knew that he had been taken to the Priory to see her daughter: she knew that his grandfather would lose little time when he had seen her of broaching the subject of a marriage on which he and she had set their minds: and she knew that on their way home they had parted abruptly, and Jack himself had taken the first train to Town and busied himself there making preparations to throw up his nebulous career at the bar and realize his effects with a view to emigrating.

It was quite clear to his mind that, whether the experimental drive from Eggott brought back the Colonel's memory of the previous drive or not, Lady Crewen could very easily "reconstruct" for him what had actually happened up to the point of their quarrel—if she chose.

With a careless apology to his companion he strolled back to join them.

"I know that you hate fussiness, sir," he said to the old man, "but it does really seem to me unnecessarily imprudent for you to remain at a standstill in a spot like this with excellent cover all round us. Don't you think so, Lady Crewen?"

The Colonel, who had stopped deliberately in the middle of a sentence as he approached within earshot, laughed jarringly.

"I can quite understand you being nervous," he said with angry irony, "but I shall not stir from here until I have heard all that Lady Crewen has to tell me. I will speak to *you* presently."

He waved him away impatiently as he spoke, and Jack made no further protest.

"I believe *you* have been prejudicing Colonel Yemmerde against my friend, Miss Somerset?" he said as he rejoined Olga Crewen, speaking with an easy nonchalance that disguised the white rage in his heart.

He did not doubt that her mother had already broken the precarious thread of forgetfulness which had allowed him to enjoy his grandfather's favor again, and he hated the women all the more because there was no explanation now of their mischief making except pure vindictiveness.

"Miss Somerset? Who is she?" Olga Crewen was asking with languid insolence.

Jack did not trouble to answer. His

protest against the Colonel's imprudence had not been insincere and he turned his back on the Crewen car to keep vigilant watch on the many points where an enemy might take ambush.

"You don't mean the writing-woman, do you?" Miss Crewen persisted when she found her question ignored. "How could I prejudice anybody against her? I don't really know her," she said after another silence.

Lady Crewen joined them, looking really disturbed.

"Now that we have seen Mr. Yemmerde and the Colonel, we may as well go home," she said to her daughter, and held out a fat hand to Jack with an apologetic air.

"Good-by. I am afraid that I have got you into trouble, but it was quite unintentional on my part. I did not know there had been a quarrel or that anything I said would remind the poor Colonel of it. You *will* believe that, won't you?"

Jack opened the door of the car for her, ignoring her hand.

"I am afraid I cannot, Lady Crewen," he said.

There was this much compensation for knowing that the worst had happened: there was no need for any pretense of friendliness with these women who had come into his life without his invitation or wish and injured him irreparably without even the excuse of benefiting themselves. He drew a breath of relief as the car turned.

At the same moment the Colonel started the ramshackle old machine that so strangely contrasted with its splendor, and almost ran Jack down in turning.

It was apparent that the driver ignored his presence in the road entirely, and Jack who had no intention of being left there ran alongside and jumped into his seat.

"I should not mind, sir," he said with suddenly quickened temper, "if you quarreled with me on your own account, but I confess it makes me sick to see you quarreling with me at the dictation of an old woman that you have known for six months. I can quite understand her trying to marry her girl into a respectable family, but on my honor, sir, I cannot understand you wanting to ally yourself with a shady Jewish financier."

The Colonel pulled up the car abruptly. It stopped at almost the precise point by the finger-post where Jack had received his conge two days earlier.

If Jack was heated, his grandfather was white hot, but the stimulus of passion kept both their voices cold, clean cut and incisive.

"I am afraid you are still trying to trade on my loss of memory," said the Colonel cuttingly. "But I happen to remember that the question of your marriage to the niece of Michael Lewin was a minor matter. Lady Crewen happened to mention the name of a Miss Somerset and recalled your own account of her, a woman who lives by her wits. Not that it matters to me what 'the only woman you will ever marry' happens to be. I want no dealings with a cur who takes advantage of an accident to come fawning round a man who has done with—him. You damned hypocrite, pretending that you wanted to help me to remember what happened on Wednesday when you knew that you were here eating my bread only because I had forgotten."

Jack answered more deliberately.

"I came down because you sent for me, sir, and if I was glad to find that you had forgotten our quarrel, you must admit that I placed no obstacle in the way of the reconstruction."

The Colonel interrupted him.

"I do not wish to argue. If you are still in the same mind about this Somerset woman, we part here. We said all that there was to be said about it on Wednesday."

"If you are still accepting the dictation of the Crewen woman and taking her judgment of the girl I love instead of forming your own, I do not want to argue either. There is nothing more to be said on that score. But this time I

am going to see you home, sir. The last time I left you here, the result was rather disastrous. This time it might be more disastrous still: I shall see you safe to the Towers, and I may say that if I leave home I shall not leave the neighborhood while the threat of the post-card is hanging over you."

He was surprised to find the old man driven to fury by his offer of protection. Forsaking words the Colonel tried to thrust him from his seat by main force, and made argument useless. Jack had to step out into the road as the only alternative to a physical struggle with an old man.

"If you won't accept my protection," he said, "you might at least take Uncle Claude's revolver to protect yourself."

He had dropped it into the pocket of his light motor-coat to spring on the car and took it out as he spoke to hand it to the enraged old man.

The Colonel pushed it away with a violence that might have caused an accident, and Jack slipped the weapon back in his pocket.

"If you like to play into the enemy's hand, it is your own affair, sir," he said, and if there was anger in his voice it was anger only against the old man's stubborn imprudence.

The thought of his grandfather's danger from the mysterious Kuklux filled his mind to the exclusion of any emotion connected with his own dismissal. He followed the car almost at a run, his ears tense with the expectation of a shot.

But his fears were unrealized, and he reached the Towers to hear from the gardener's wife at the lodge that his grandfather had returned safely.

He turned away as soon as he had been assured of the fact. The idea of trying to see the Colonel and argue the question of his disinheritance afresh did not even suggest itself to his mind, and he walked on to Mendelstone town. Whether the old man liked it or not, it was the right thing to inform the police that he was threatened and place him under their protection.

For himself he intended to put up at the Railway Hotel for a week in order to be on the spot and render his grandfather what protection he could without his permission.

But as he came out of the police station, where he had left the post-card and considerable excitement, a telegraph boy just starting for the Towers recognized him and saved himself a journey.

The telegram was from Joanna and said:

Just heard Griggs died under operation. Inquest to-morrow ten at hospital. Can you attend?

Griggs was the unfortunate tramp who had been injured by his car at Wimbleby and Jack walked over to the post-office and wired his reply without a moment's hesitation:

Coming up to you at once.

As an afterthought he added:

Disinherited again.

CHAPTER XII.

Another Victim.

NO ordinary human calculation of probabilities is ever scientific or based upon fair arithmetic. Always emotion, prejudice, and partiality jog the scale and give an arbitrary value to mere figures.

When he had first heard that his grandfather's motor-car was responsible for Gibson's death, Jack had smiled at the Marquis's abject terror of the League. He had decided that there was little chance of the Colonel being singled out for its resentment.

But when it was Joanna who might be made their victim he was seized instantly by a terror of the mysterious Kuklux as complete as his uncle's. He found himself crediting an association of mere human beings with almost supernatural powers.

The fact that nothing could be more brutally ruthless and unfair than to take vengeance on Joanna for what

had actually been a wonderful piece of management by which one life was sacrificed to save many, the fact that her life was full of promise, that he had given up his inheritance for love of her, that she was the only woman he would ever marry, only served to fill him with an unreasoned conviction that she was already doomed.

Although no account of the accident at Wimbleby Hollow had appeared in the press, although there had been no warning post-card about it, the danger to Joanna loomed in his mind as greater than the danger to his grandfather because it mattered so much more. There is no science and no arithmetic in the human calculation of probabilities.

If his grandfather had not quarreled with him, if he had been consciously depending on his protection against the League, it is possible that he might have found himself engaged on a painful mental struggle, a question whether he ought to give his protection to his grandfather or the woman he loved.

But since the Colonel had scoffed at his protection and given him less power to watch over his safety than one of his servants, he did not feel a moment's hesitation on the matter.

If a sense of duty, joined to a zest for adventure and a sporting determination to thwart a mysterious association that had so far terrorized the country by its success, had made him decide to remain at Mendelstone all three motives called him to watch over Joanna, now that his grandfather had absolved him from any claim of duty toward him.

He had still time to catch the four o'clock train. He spent an intolerable twenty minutes marching up and down the deserted platform until the train for which he was the only passenger from Mendelstone came in.

He had decided instantly that Joanna must follow one of two courses: as soon as the inquest on Griggs was over, and before an account of it appeared in the newspapers, she must ensconce herself securely within a guarded home, or she must leave England. Yemmerde was of the opinion that Malcolm Ray, the threatened stockbroker, had escaped the Kuklux by going abroad, although the question was still an open one.

In either case Jack felt that he ought not to let Joanna out of his sight, night or day.

Everything pointed to the one means by which he could guard her as he wished. If he could only marry her at once and take her straight away to a delightful little French fishing-village that he knew!

And he could not marry her because he was a man without means. He writhed under a sense of unbearable impotence.

At times during the tedious railway journey a fierce temptation shook him. To marry Joanna and leave it to the future to decide whether he could earn enough to justify the marriage. The temptation of it brought the blood to his face and back again.

He intended to drive direct to Elstone House as soon as he reached London, but at Liverpool Street he was surprised to find Walker, his man, on the platform looking out for him.

"Hello! how did you know I was coming back?" he said.

"I had a wire from Mendelstone, sir, and they asked me to meet the train in case you were not thinking of going home direct. They wanted you to have the news at the first possible moment."

Jack stared at him.

"The news? What news?"

"Very bad, I am afraid, sir," said Walter gravely, and the color faded from Jack's face.

"Not that Colonel Yemmerde has been shot?"

"Yes, I am afraid that is it, sir," said Walker, his tone apologetic. "There is a telegram for you which I have brought with me."

He had it in his hand, and Jack tore

open the envelope hastily to find Walker's announcement confirmed.

His grandfather had been shot dead within half a mile of home while alone in his motor.

The unsigned message which, like his man's, had actually been sent by Markham, the butler at the Towers, was short and meager, and Jack dashed into a taxi with Walker to phone through from his club for particulars.

A bewildered curiosity to know them all kept every other emotion spellbound. He could not feel that his grandfather was dead until the account of his death was made more plausible, and it was not until he was talking to Markham across the wire that the effect of the tragedy on his own fortunes suggested itself to his mind.

The butler gave his information with admirable clearness and conciseness.

The "poor master" had returned safely from Eggott. He had appeared to be in a very angry mood and had gone at once to the telephone in the hall to call up Mr. Lovelock, the lawyer, asking him to come over at once as he wished to make important alterations in his will.

Mr. Lovelock was still confined to his house with gout, and the master had indignantly refused his offer to send over his clerk and decided to drive over himself to the lawyer's. He had sent for Lecky, who was whitewashing the garage at the time, to drive him, but by the time the chauffeur was ready it was found that one of the tires had mysteriously subsided.

In adjusting a fresh tire Lecky had cut his wrist badly on a jagged edge of the mudguard injured in the Gibson accident. To Markham at least it was apparent that the old "two-seater" had done its best to emulate Balaam's ass and warn its master against starting on his last fatal journey.

But opposition as usual only made Colonel Yemmerde more determined in his purpose, and finding that Lecky was really disabled from driving, he had started alone, taking the more deserted, if it was also the most direct, road to the lawyer's house along Station Lane. Had he taken the little wider détour through the town, he would have met Inspector Quizzledick on his way to offer him police protection.

Shortly after four the Superintendent, driving over to Mr. Lovelock's in pursuit of him, had found his dead body lying by the side of his overturned car in the ditch that divided Station Lane from the Mendelstone Woods.

The first impression was that the Colonel had simply made a mistake in his driving and had been thrown from the car and killed when it ran into the ditch, but Dr. Copper, hastily summoned, had discovered a bullet wound over the heart which left nobody in doubt that the threat of the post-card had been carried out, and that the motor had run into the ditch only because there was a dead man at the wheel. The whole neighborhood was in a state of consternation, and excited search was being made for the murderer, so far without success.

The Marquis, to whom Jack had wished to speak, was utterly prostrated and unable to come down to the phone. By the irony of fate, however, Mr. Lovelock's clerk, whose services the Colonel had indignantly refused, was now at the Towers to take control of his interests until the arrival of his heir, and the butler gave up the place at the wire to him.

Mr. Williams, whom Jack knew well, and whom he considered a great deal more capable and clever than his principal, gave him an additional item of interesting information. The Colonel in telephoning to the lawyer had instructed him to destroy his will, pending the drawing up of a new one; Mr. Lovelock had, however, not considered it justifiable to act merely upon the authority of a message over the

phone, and the will, which left Jack practically sold legatee, was still in the lawyer's safe.

Mr. Williams was expecting the heir to come down by the night train, but Jack had other plans now.

"I am afraid that I shall have to leave everything in your hands," he said. "You have the Marquis to consult with over the funeral arrangements."

"But you will be here for the funeral, Mr. Yemmerde?" asked the old clerk, the remonstrant surprise in his tone carrying distinctly over sixty miles of wire.

"I am afraid not, if I want to avoid my own," said Jack. "The truth is that I am expecting the attentions of the Motor Kuklux myself. The inquest on the man my car killed is to-morrow, and immediately after it I shall cut off abroad. I must leave everything in your hands and the Marquis's."

His course was quite clear to him. When an impatient telephone girl cut him off from the Towers, he rang up a lawyer friend whose chambers he would pass on his way to South Kensington, to find out whether he was, in and in case he was could he give him ten minutes undivided attention when he called.

He did not phone to Joanna. He had so much to say to her that he preferred to say nothing until they were face to face.

It was nine o'clock when he dismissed his taxi at Elstone House and ran up to her rooms three steps at a time to find her alone. She had been far too excited by the thought of his return to think of writing, and had insisted on the faithful Miss Collins, remembering that she had her own career to think of and an evening art class to attend.

Jack clasped her in his arms as she met him at the door, and for the first time kissed her with a sense of complete unshamed possession.

"I don't want to startle you, darling," he said, "but you've got to marry me to-morrow."

CHAPTER XIII.

Clues.

"AND you *will* take me to Rhodesia with you, won't you?" said Joanna, as soon as she could draw breath after their first long, strained embrace.

He smiled down gravely on her upturned face, very conscious that only the tragedy of which she had still to hear had given him his thrilling sense of power and freedom.

"Certainly if I go, darling," he said, and kissed her again. "But I only want to get you far enough away to be safe from any possibility of danger on account of that poor tramp's death. I have ceased to think that the danger of this damnable League can be ignored. It has come too near home for that. I want to take you across to France as soon as we can be made one.

"My lawyer friend, Hampden Hill, is seeing about the special license, and has promised that we shall be married to-morrow if it is humanly possible. At the latest we can be married on Sunday morning in time to catch the boat-train, but I hope it will be to-morrow after the Wimbleby inquest. I shall call for you at eight and motor you down."

Joanna interrupted him with a fine effort of conscientiousness.

"But if you marry me, dearest, won't it make Colonel Yemmerde's quarrel with you permanent. Oh! I know that he has threatened to disinherit you unless you marry that Crewen girl, but he cannot be so unreasonable when he realizes that you do not care for her. He will relent in time unless you have offended him beyond forgiveness by marrying a girl he does not approve of, like myself."

Yemmerde's face was very grave.

"My grandfather has ceased to have a voice in our affairs," he said.

"Oh, I know that he had disinherited you," she said again, without a suspicion of the truth, "but he will change his mind."

Jack interrupted her.

"He is beyond all power of changing his mind now, dearest. He intended to disinherit me, but he died before he could carry out his intention. So I believe that—"

Joanna was startled and shocked.

"Colonel Yemmerde is dead. You did not tell me. But surely his death must have been terribly sudden?"

"Yes, terribly sudden," he assented.

"He was more severely injured in his motor accident than you imagined?" she hazarded, and Jack shook his head.

"No, the accident did him very little harm. But he had the misfortune to cause another man's death."

Joanna's soft eyes opened wide in tragic consternation, the consternation of one who is shown to be responsible for a catastrophe.

"You do not mean that his life has been taken by this murderer, by the Motor Kuklux? But he must have received a warning," she continued eagerly as only Jack's silence answered her question. "There has always been a warning. If Colonel Yemmerde received the post-card why did you not tell me, why was there no mention of it in the newspapers? If we had only known, he might not have been killed."

She had turned from him to pace the floor in her fever of dismay, and Jack wondered.

"He had the post-card by this afternoon's post," he said, "and the threat was carried out barely an hour later. I did not hear till I reached town. My man was waiting for me at Liverpool Street with a telegram from home. What do you mean by saying that we might have prevented it. What could we have done?"

"I was thinking of Sir Julian Daymont," she said. *"He and I know who is committing the Kuklux murders."*

Jack stared at her, almost wondering whether she knew what she was saying.

"You know who is committing the Kuklux murders?" he repeated incredulously, and speaking very deliberately. "And you have not informed the police."

Joanna turned toward him a distressed face.

"Sir Julian was anxious that we should get our case quite complete and enable the police to lay their hands actually on the man before we said anything. The police are so suspicious of theory, they will not accept a reasonable certainty. Sir Julian is so afraid that they will bungle the affair and give the man time to know that he is discovered and commit suicide before he has cleared up the whole business by a confession.

"He wanted to have a talk with the man himself before the police were called in. And we agreed that it would be safe to keep to ourselves what we have found out until we heard that another post-card had been sent out. If Sir Julian had known that Colonel Yemmerde was threatened he would have told the police all he knows, and it might have saved his life. The murderer would not have dared to shoot him if he had realized that his name, his identity, and his responsibility for the warning to the clubs was known."

She was terribly distressed, and Jack rose and put his arm round her.

"It was Sir Julian who discovered it," she went on, wiping her eyes, "and of course it was an accident that helped him. I doubt, though, whether anybody else would have noticed the clue that chance threw in our way."

Jack winced at the repeated name. He had stopped his sweetheart's distressed pacing of the floor by drawing her to the settee with his arm around her, and his arm became suddenly limp.

He had never been able to wholly conquer his jealousy of Sir Julian

Daymont even when he knew that Joanna had had the choice of marrying him and had resolutely refused it. He knew that it was petty and ignoble of him, and yet he could not quite conquer a secret wish that Daymont would show himself less impeccably deserving of the frank admiration and unqualified gratitude with which Joanna regarded the man who had helped her to her career.

Daymont's perfection galled him, and his brow darkened as his sweetheart continued:

"What I am going to tell you is, of course, Sir Julian's copyright, and he would think that I had betrayed his confidence if a word of it became public before he has decided on the right moment to make his discovery known. I don't believe that he would wait a moment longer if he knew that Colonel Yemmerde has been killed by the man he is trying to find.

"Unfortunately I cannot let him know unless he wires me his address to-night. He is on his way to Sheffield in pursuit of the clue, and he does not even know yet that Griggs is dead. Oh! I wish that he were here to decide what ought to be done."

"I dare say we can manage without him," said Jack dryly, "if you will tell me how much he has discovered. Does he reckon to have unearthed the whole League of Personal Safety, or only one man in it?"

"There is only one man in it," said Joanna quickly. "That at least is the conclusion we have arrived at. But I will tell you exactly what we have found out."

"The 'we' standing for you and Daymont?" he queried sulkily.

"Sir Julian and I and my typewriter," she said, with a wave of her hand toward the machine on her writing-table. "The typewriter played a most important part. Sir Julian discovered that the warning letter which was sent out to the automobile clubs before the murders began was written on my machine. An accidental peculiarity in the type made it quite certain."

"On your machine?" he gasped, with the instinctive incredulous surprise with which one always finds the mental chasm between the sensational happenings of the newspaper and the matter-of-fact life one knows abruptly bridged.

Joanna nodded.

"You remember how anxious I was to know what you used the typewriter for. That was only that I might give Sir Julian a clear announcement that it had not been used by any of my friends without my knowing what it had been used for. That left us with the inference that somebody in the house must have used my typewriter without my knowledge, and our suspicions pointed easily to one person, a Mr. Milldane."

"Living here?" said Jack, and glanced apprehensively at the door.

Joanna smiled.

"Oh! he is not living here now, unfortunately. That is the difficulty. He was staying in the rooms immediately above this when the letters to the clubs were written, but he left suddenly after the first murder, and the trouble is to find where he is gone. That is what Sir Julian is trying to discover now. That is what has taken him to Yorkshire."

"In emulation of his famous 'Vergil White,' I suppose," said Jack, who would have liked nothing so much as to find that Joanna's hero had made a mistake. "Has Daymont anything else to go on?"

"That is just it," said Joanna eagerly. "We have found out enough to make us quite satisfied that this Mr. Milldane is a member of the League, and to make us think that he is the whole League and has no associates, but evidence that will convict him in a court of law is another matter, and that is why Sir Julian wanted to find out more about him before he gave any information to the police.

"Our suspicion centered itself on

him at the outset chiefly because there did not seem anybody else in the house to suspect, and this Mr. Milldane had admitted a violent prejudice against the motor-car. And then there was the fact that he left without notice immediately after the first murder. It is what a man would naturally do if he was afraid that the crime might be brought home to him."

Jack permitted himself to smile. Any action is suspicious for those who have made up their minds to suspect.

Joanna was continuing:

"Everything we have found out about Mr. Milldane has confirmed our theory. He used to spend almost his whole time reading newspapers that came to him from all parts of the country. Sometimes he took cuttings from them. Well! Mrs. Vyner has a great stack of the papers he left behind him, some of them with cuttings taken from them, and the first thing Sir Julian did was to compare these latter with the files at the offices of the papers—those that had a London office—and discover what the cuttings Mr. Milldane had taken were. In every case the paragraph that had been extracted was about some accident caused by a motor-car or some case of careless driving or exceeding the speed limit."

Jack was impressed.

"That is curious, certainly," he said. "Anything more?"

"Yes. On the day that Sir Julian began his investigations—the day we went to Ambleham Abbey—a post-card came here for Mr. Milldane from a niece of his at Bedford, and Sir Julian thought it worth while to go and see her. He is very clever at getting information from people without giving any in return."

"Of course," said Jack. "Well?"

Joanna was too interested in marshaling her evidence to notice his ill-temper.

"The niece, a Mrs. Reason, who is living with her husband in rather poor circumstances," she continued, "could give him no hint as to her uncle's whereabouts. She had heard nothing from him for more than a month, and had written the post-card to ask why he did not write.

"But she gave Sir Julian a full account of the man we suspect, and it all tends to confirm our theory that he constitutes the whole of the League. He is a man of about fifty who has lived most of his life in India. He was a planter or something of that sort, and two years ago he retired with a comfortable fortune, came to England, and married a young and beautiful wife, who he idolized.

"Six months after the wedding she was knocked down and killed by a motor-car in a country lane near Weybridge, where they were thinking of taking a house. His niece believes—she made the suggestion quite innocently and on her own initiative—that the tragedy has completely turned his brain.

"He was so violent at the inquest on his wife that he had to be turned out, and he raved like a maniac when the driver was exonerated from blame. He was seriously ill after it, and Mrs. Reason, who seems to be his only living relation, nursed him. She does not believe that he ever really recovered. He was quite a changed man, moody and morose, and he showed no gratitude for her care. She had expected him to make his home with her, but he always wanted to be alone, and could not be persuaded to let his niece look after him. She was really expecting to hear that he had committed suicide. Instead of which he has taken this terrible means of avenging his wife's death."

"According to Daymont's theory," said Jack. "Is that really all the sum total of facts that he has got?"

"Except that the first Kuklux post-card was sent from South Kensington when Milldane was living here."

Jack laughed in his relief.

"This is only a theory," he said. "You really made me think that Vergil White had unearthed the whole busi-

ness, and that you did not stand in any need of my protection at all, little woman."

CHAPTER XIV.

On Milldane's Trail.

JOANNA was too completely obsessed by the theory she and Sir Julian Daymont had arrived at, to be made doubtful even by her lover.

"Can you imagine any circumstances more clearly calculated to make a man conceive and carry out this ruthless revenge on motorists as a class than this retired Indian planter's," she demanded. "His romance—and the marriage seems to have been a real love romance—came late in his life, and when it was cut short by his wife's death, a few months before she could give him the child to whose advent he was eagerly looking forward, it left him with nothing to live for.

"He made an attempt at suicide immediately after her death, but it was frustrated, and we imagine that he is committing these murders really as a subtle and prolonged form of suicide. He knows that eventually he must be caught and hanged. But he has nothing else to live for except revenge and wishes to die.

"That is why he has been so strangely successful. In nine cases out of ten the ordinary murderer betrays himself by his efforts to avoid suspicion before or after his crime. We fancy that Milldane makes none, and owes his remarkable immunity to the fact that he is really indifferent whether he is caught or not."

"If your theory that he is connected with the Kuklux is at all correct," said Jack, a little sullen still. He had come to see Joanna, expecting a meeting wholly emotional, and in some way all emotion seemed to have been put on one side for a discussion so purely intellectual that it made even the protective embrace of his arm round his sweetheart's waist seem out of place.

He doubted whether Joanna knew that his arm was there, as she elaborated her theory, a theory that he took to be more Daymont's than her own. Her very wording seemed to him reminiscent of conferences with the "master of deductive reasoning," as the papers were fond of calling Sir Julian.

Joanna noticed the tone this time, and whether she understood the jealousy that lay behind it or not, she drew his face down to hers and kissed him.

"If my theory is correct," she said, "Mr. Milldane will probably send me a post-card as soon as the report of the inquest to-morrow is published, and lay plans for waylaying and murdering me. That is why I want you to know all about him before we discuss anything else. Shall I tell you how far we have got, not that it is really worth telling when it is so little, but I should like you know."

"Please go on," he said contritely, and with Joanna's arm round his neck did not even wince at the "we" which made her and Sir Julian allies and joint investigators.

She was still absorbed by the intellectual argument.

"If the whole Kuklux business is the work of one solitary man, as we think," she continued eagerly, "it is much less wonderful and terrible. It is quite easy to imagine one morbid and heart-broken man devoting himself to revenge like this, and risking his life on it.

"What everybody has been imagining is an impossible association of men, all equally morbid and self-sacrificing, and revengeful, so united that the offer of a tremendous reward could not tempt one to betray his fellows, so well organized that its edicts were carried out without a hitch. That is an impossible sort of society that exists only in fiction. The really clever thing that Milldane did was to give the impression of such an association by calling himself the 'League of Personal Safety.'

"Sir Julian felt certain that he must be a chess-player. He has a theory that only chess-players achieve the art of foreseeing a dramatic effect and producing it, and strangely enough, it turns out that chess has always been Milldane's one hobby.

"Daymont is wonderful," said Jack with irony in his voice, because his sweetheart had forgotten again that they were sweethearts in the mental interest of her argument, "but how do you know that your suspect has no associates?"

"Only because he appears to have no acquaintances," she said, absorbed still in the argument. "The only letters he received while he was living here were from his niece. He never received visitors, and he rarely went out except for a constitutional at a regular hour. We know, too, that he is a reserved and retiring man, who makes few friends."

"You seem to know a great deal about him," said Jack. "Is Daymont having him watched?"

Joanna threw out her hands in a pretty gesture of helplessness.

"We have first to find him. Sir Julian has been ill and only started on the clue this week. It is more than a month now since Mr. Milldane gave up his rooms here and—vanished. He gave Mrs. Vyner no idea where he was going, and no address to which to send letters that might come for him.

"As a matter of fact, the post-card from his niece is the only private communication which has come for him since he left, but the newspapers which came to him by post continued to arrive for two or three days after he had gone. The principal London papers were delivered by the news-agent. That order was countermanded by Mr. Milldane on the day that he went away. How would you try to trace him?"

"I suppose he had a taxi or cab to take his luggage," said Jack readily. "I should try and find the driver—by advertisement if necessary."

Joanna nodded.

"We thought that a public advertisement would put Mr. Milldane on his guard, but we managed to find the four-wheeler which took him away from here, without it. The cab took him to Victoria station where he deposited his luggage in the cloak-room. But there is where that clue ends. You see our inquiries were a month behind the happening, and there was nothing out of the common about Milldane or his luggage to make anybody remember him. His luggage had been removed but nobody so far has been able to tell us when and how. But we have not spent much time over that inquiry because we hoped to find out where Mr. Milldane had gone much more easily."

"How?" said Jack, and the next moment was annoyed with himself for asking the question instead of solving the easy problem for himself, and discounting Daymont's cleverness—if, as he imagined, the little bit of deductive reasoning was his.

"The fact that Mr. Milldane's newspapers which came direct to him by post from their offices in the provinces ceased to arrive here, showed, of course, that he had sent directions," said Joanna. "We did not think it probable that he would cease to take the papers in because he had gone to a new address, and Sir Julian wrote or wired or telephoned to every newspaper which sent Mr. Milldane a daily copy through the post, asking if they would oblige him with his new address.

"From every one of them the reply was practically the same. Mr. Milldane had not asked for his papers to be sent to a new address. He had simply asked them to discontinue sending them to him at all, giving his address still at Elstone House.

"It was really a great blow to us. It not only disappointed our confident hope of finding out where Mr. Milldane had gone, but it seemed to show that he was just as much on the alert

to avoid being traced as we were to trace him. We felt so sure that he would not give up his newspapers."

"He may be taking them in another name," suggested Jack, and his sweetheart's eyes glowed with swift surprise and admiration.

"I told Sir Julian that you would help us if only he would let me ask you," she said, "but he thought that we were quite sufficient by ourselves, and, of course, you had forbidden me to say that we were engaged. Do you know that it did not occur to either of us for half a day that Mr. Milldane would probably change his name as well as his address, and have the newspapers sent to him under his new name.

"That is the idea Sir Julian is following up now. He thinks the most satisfactory plan is to go himself to the newspaper offices. He wants to see the names of new subscribers for five or six of the papers, and if one name appears in all of them he is pretty sure that he has got Milldane's new pseudonym and dress.

"The towns from which he got his papers are very scattered and far apart in the south; but in Yorkshire there is quite a cluster of them comparatively close together—Sheffield, Bradford, Leeds, Huddersfield, York, and others. Sir Julian thought it would be worth the journey to go the round of the newspaper offices and compare their lists."

Jack was ridiculously gratified by her appreciation.

"Daymont believes in being thorough," he said complacently, accepting the rôle she offered him of advisory critic. "I am afraid I should have been more slap-dash. I should have rung up the smallest paper on the list. I do not suppose that a moderately important provincial paper gets more than one new postal subscriber in a week. If they had more than one, I should ring up the next smallest. If the same name occurred in both lists that would be enough for me. But it would only mean that we had found Milldane. It would not prove that he had anything to do with the Kuklux. What is Daymont's next step if he finds him?"

"Sir Julian says that he will call on him and tax him directly with responsibility for the Kuklux."

Jack shrugged his broad shoulders.

"That is rather risky, isn't it? One thing is pretty certain that the man who committed the Kuklux murders knows how to handle a revolver, and is an unerring shot."

Joanna's face was very troubled.

"I think it would be horribly dangerous. I have begged him not to visit the man alone, but he won't give me a promise. He says that he wants nothing so much as a heart-to-heart talk with the originator of the L. P. S., and that he could only get it before his arrest. Afterward he would be beset by a hedge of formalities. Sir Julian is a very good revolver shot himself, but he has an idea that poor Milldane is very proud of what he has done, and will be quite pleased to talk about it when he finds that he has been discovered. I think it would be foolhardy to meet him alone."

Jack did not mind the anxious concern in her voice. He felt concerned himself for Sir Julian, and half his jealousy had slipped away from him when his sweetheart put him on a par with, if not superior to, Daymont as a deductive reasoner.

The other half prompted his next inquiry.

"If everything turns out as Daymont has planned it: say that he finds out Milldane's address from the newspaper people, goes there, and the man caves in and confesses that he is responsible for all the Kuklux murders—how long does he expect the business to take him?"

Joanna had the whole program.

"He expected to reach Sheffield in time to interview two newspaper offices there this evening. Unless he found anything very suggestive—when a man chooses a pseudonym he

often gives a clue to his real name by retaining the same initials or simply making a variation on the name, and if Milldane has done anything like that in ordering his papers from Sheffield, Sir Julian would come back by the night train, and see him, if he is in London to-morrow morning. If not, he would go on to Huddersfield, and do Huddersfield, Leeds, and Bradford in the morning. If that was enough he would be back by five in the afternoon, he thinks, and visit Milldane before six. By to-morrow evening the whole Kuklux mystery may be solved. Wouldn't it make a sensation?"

Jack was not enthusiastic.

"And to-morrow evening we may or we may not be married," he said reflectively. "It all depends whether Hill can get the arrangements through, and he was rather doubtful whether it could be done. Look here, little woman, I want you to promise me something. I want you to promise that whether the Kuklux business is shown up and stopped or not, you will marry me just the same at the first moment it is possible. I've been telling myself that I was just thinking about your safety, but I am not. I want you, and I don't want any silly waiting. You will promise, darling."

Joanna gave a little tense laugh as the embrace of his arms tightened. Her cheeks were glowing.

"I have not said that I would marry you to-morrow whether the Kuklux is discovered or not," she said. "And I certainly should see if you were just thinking of my safety. A week ago I suppose I should have felt that there were a hundred objections to taking such a serious step so quickly, but for two days I have been thinkink that you would go to Rhodesia, and that I should perhaps never see you again—and I want to make sure that you won't go alone. I could not do without you, dear, and I will promise if you will promise me something."

"Yes?"

"I want you to promise that if there should be any doubt about your inheritance—if you should find yourself after all as poor as you expected to be—that it won't make any difference. You will marry me and let me go with you wherever you go."

"Yes, I will promise that," he said. "I believe it is absolutely safe. It would break my heart though if I could not make you mistress of the Towers, darling, and have the laugh on those Crewen women when they cross our path again."

CHAPTER XV.

The Car Behind.

YEMMERDE rose the next morning, after a restless night, a prey to the most tragic fears which his reason told him were at present wholly unjustified. The belief which Joanna and Sir Julian Daymont held that the League consisted solely of one rather pitiable, elderly man instead of reassuring him, added to his nervous fears, by suggesting reasonable grounds for them.

The early morning post had brought him a long letter from Mr. Williams, the lawyer, who appeared to think that he ought to return to Mendelstone or give explicit details of his own motor accident to be quoted as justification of his absence to Mendelstone society.

Jack had not time to read it through.

The conventions of mourning had never seemed to him so hollow and hypocritical as now that they made their claim against plans of life and death interest. The lawyer thought he would be wanted at the inquest on his grandfather that afternoon. What could he say except that the dead man had been reckless and stubborn and foolhardy, and that his recklessness had been chiefly due to an insane and wholly unreasonable anger against himself for daring to say that he intended to marry the woman he loved.

Mr. Williams thought he ought to make some sacrifice to attend the

funeral. How could he pose as a mourner without feeling a hypocrite when he knew that, had the man he pretended to mourn been alive, he would have ordered him out of the place and disowned their relationship.

Jack thrust the letter into his pocket to finish when he had time to spare for the consideration of appearances, and swallowed his breakfast from a sense of duty because he wanted to be very "fit" for the day. He had conquered an inclination to ring up Elstone House and make sure that Joanna had got through the night safely, because, if he was not ashamed of his fit of nerves, he was very determined not to show it, and he compromised with his anxiety by calling for Joanna nearly half an hour before the time he had arranged.

Joanna had risen early, however, and was ready at the sound of his car stopping at the house to run down and open the hall door for him in person.

Her wrist was already free of bandages, and in her neat tailor-made traveling dress she looked quite robust, a picture of health and life that answered his fears of the night.

But her complete charm and desirability only quickened his apprehension. It seemed too wonderful to be true that in a few hours she would be his wife, and the wonder of it made her alternative fate more vivid in his mind.

He glanced round apprehensively as she ran down the steps to meet him.

"You are safer indoors, little woman, until we are quite ready to start," he said, as they clasped hands and he hurried her back to the hall.

Joanna, all aglow with happy excitement, laughed at his caution.

"But the game of hide-and-seek has not begun yet," she said, and made him shiver with a remembrance of his grandfather's indifference to danger and its sequel.

"You are too precious to run any risks, dear one," he said. "Let us be over-careful to-day."

In the house there was no little excitement. It had been planned overnight that Joanna should not return in any case to Elstone House after the Wimbleby inquest, and her luggage for the honeymoon in France was brought down to the car to be deposited at Charing Cross station before they went down to Wimbleby.

Only Mary Collins and Mrs. Vyner knew the exact circumstances under which she was leaving, but the fact that Miss Somerset was going to be married had spread through the house and roused a sentimental excitement in the minds of several ladies who had never exchanged words with her.

When the car started it was almost as though they were starting for the church. The yellow-haired lady who occupied the room next to Joanna's, indeed, threw an old shoe after them, as if they were already married and were going off on their honeymoon.

The premature excitement only made Yemmerde more nervous. It made too vivid the dramatic difference between hope and fear, and Joanna found him very silent.

He was not driving the car himself this time, and they sat together in the tonneau with a hired man from the garage in the driver's seat.

Joanna herself seemed very animated and happy as she sat with her hand clasped in her lover's, chatting about the incidents of the morning.

"Sir Julian has not sent any message yet," she said, "which means, I suppose, that Sheffield did not produce anything very important. I think he will be very much shocked when he knows that another murder has been committed. The police, I suppose, will issue a description of the man and offer a reward for information as to his whereabouts. You have seen the paper this morning, of course. It is full of the tragedy, although they know nothing more than you told me last night."

"It is the one announcement on every newspaper placard," he said. "The streets seem full of it, and I suppose everybody in England is talking about it now. And I, when I was al-

most on the spot, when I ought to be more concerned about it than anybody else in the world, have not time to think about it yet. I have not read the newspaper account through, but I have come across one thing I wish they had left out. I had to give the lawyer who is managing affairs at Mendelstone my reason for not attending the inquest and forgot that he would have the reporters swarming round him."

He had a copy of the *Morning Post* with him and handed it to her with his finger on the paragraph.

Joanna guessed what it was before she saw it, however.

"You mean about the coincidence that 'Mr. Jack Yemmerde, of the Inner Temple, grandson and heir of the deceased who left Mendelstone only a few minutes before the tragedy was discovered, has been himself involved in a motor accident through which a life was lost and has been urged by his friends not to return to the Towers while the assassin is still at large,'" she quoted. "Who are the friends?"

"That is what I wondered. But, of course, the paragraph has been inspired by Williams, the lawyer. He is very keen on keeping up appearances, and was very shocked when I phoned him last night that I sha'n't be back for the inquest on the Colonel or the funeral. He wanted some excuse to make for what might appear 'rather unusual conduct' on my part, and has evidently lost no time in making the best use of the one I gave him.

"If I turn up, as he is still hoping I shall do—I had a long letter from him this morning—it will mean that I have courageously ignored the warning of my friends in order to do the correct thing. If I don't turn up, it will not mean that I am personally afraid, but have surrendered to the solicitations of those around me, as King Manuel did when he wanted to draw his sword and fight for his crown, but was persuaded to get into a boat and run away instead. But really I cannot manage, when I try, to care what Mendelstone thinks.

"What annoys me about the paragraph is that it draws attention to *our* accident. Already there have been newspapermen at my chambers, asking for particulars about it. I refused to see them, and they have received no particulars through me, but if there are any reporters at the inquest this morning, I am afraid my name will be enough to connect it with the sensation of the moment and insure a prominent place for the report in all the papers. Just what I wanted to avoid. I am sorry I gave Williams any reason at all why I was not going back to Mendelstone."

His voice was so troubled that Joanna forced herself to be reassuring.

"But by the time that the papers are published we shall be on our way to France," she said, and Jack looked more troubled than ever.

"That is just the question. Hill is not by any means certain that he can get it through to-day. There seem no end of formalities, and it depends how they fit in. And he is handicapped by the fact that we are both out of London, and do not know precisely when we shall be back to make the necessary affidavits and all that.

"I am wondering whether we ought to have bothered about the inquest. But I suppose we ought. If we seemed afraid of showing up and the driver of the brake told a tale to exonerate himself and got some of his passengers to back him up, anything might happen. They might even pass a verdict of 'manslaughter' against us, and that would make a pretty complication. We *had* to come, but—has it occurred to you that we are being followed?"

Joanna turned her head to follow the direction of his glance to where a quarter of a mile behind them a big yellow car followed them along the road.

"I have noticed that the yellow car is going our way," she said easily, "but that does not necessarily mean that it is pursuing us."

"No, I have only just proved it," he said. "I noticed it first pulling up at

Charing Cross when we stopped there with your luggage, although I paid no attention to it until I saw it again leaving London behind us. I have been trying to outdistance it, but the car is evidently as powerful as mine, and in that last spurt I told Mersham to make, the yellow car actually gained on us."

"The driver may have realized that it was a race," she said reassuringly, for his face had grown very anxious; "one often answers a challenge like that on a clear road, especially when a driver knows that he has a powerful machine to back him up."

Yemmerde shrugged his shoulders.

"Yes, I understand the temptation to overtake the car in front, especially when it puts on speed, but the race is never ended till it is overtaken. What bothers me about this yellow car is that it won't overtake us. For the last five minutes we have been going dead slow, just to try, and it still keeps its even distance behind us. I feel half inclined to pull up and see what the car will do."

Joanna was quite pleasantly excited.

"Why not?" she said. "If we cannot outdistance them we might just as well stop for them as wait till they choose to catch us up."

Yemmerde bowed to her reasoning and gave his order to the chauffeur to draw up by the side of the road.

"What you have got to do, little woman," he said to Joanna, "is to keep well under cover, and if you recognize anybody in the car let me know quick. If it is Milldane, I'll put a bullet through his shooting arm at sight and offer explanations afterward."

He had his own revolver ready in his hand as he spoke, not the Marquis's pretty toy, but the serviceable Colt with which he had done all his revolver practise and knew like an old friend.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK. Don't forget this magazine is issued weekly, and that you will get the continuation of this story without waiting a month.

For Your Three Best Friends

HERE IS AN IDEA:

Send me the names and addresses of three of your friends who you think will be interested in the stories in THE CAVALIER, and I will send them sample copies direct from this office. You might, if you wish, to prepare them for the coming of the magazine, write to them as well, and say that sample copies of THE CAVALIER are being sent them at your request.

This is just a suggestion. If it is too much trouble don't do it, but I will appreciate it if you would, and you will have the satisfaction of knowing that you have let your friends in on a good thing.

EDITOR, THE CAVALIER

FLATIRON BUILDING, - - 175 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK

THE NIGHT WIND'S PROMISE*

A SERIAL IN V PARTS—PART III

BY VARICK VANARDY

Author of "Alias the Night Wind," "The Return of the Night Wind," "Missing—$81,500," "That Man Crewe," etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS

PASSING himself off as Anderson Van Cleve, of Mexico, his employer, Holbrook Chilton, comes up to New York and gets nearly all Van Cleve's money from the Centropolis Bank, whose president is Bingham Harvard ("The Night Wind"), and disappears from a train. The real Van Cleve arrives, and Harvard gets Rodney Rushton, a former detective-lieutenant, out of prison to run down Chilton. Rushton sees a well-dressed stranger standing before the Hotel Mammoth rolling a cigarette with his second and third fingers, and later he meets him as Benton Keese, a former admirer of Lady Kate, Harvard's wife.

Lady Kate finds that she still detests and fears Keese just as in the past; yet is attracted to him as a bird to a snake. Tom Clancy comes in, and having previously shaken hands with Chilton, says that Keese has Chilton's grip. Keese, in order to get a foothold in the Harvard home, sends for his sister Betty, an old friend of Lady Kate. Tom Clancy promptly falls in love with her. Meanwhile Keese, who has plenty of money, made, he says, in China, sets detectives to watching everybody. At a meeting in the bank Chilton is described as rolling cigarettes with his second and third fingers. Rushton announces that he will go to Mexico.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Lady Kate's Peril.

IN the mean time Betty Keese and her alluring and hypnotic brother were motoring together in Westchester County in the high-powered roadster that was his newest possession.

But notwithstanding the fact that he had owned it only a few days he was thoroughly master of the craft of operating it—just as he very quickly became the master of whatsoever he undertook to perform.

The two were oddly silent at the beginning of their ride. Very little more than the commonest civilities were exchanged between them during the first half-hour or so of it.

The rumble seat behind them was unoccupied. They were as utterly alone, in so far as confidential conversation between them was concerned, as if they had been upon a mountain-peak.

"Well, Ben?" Betty remarked when they were gliding along within sight of the sound, going only at a moderate pace.

Then, when he made no reply, she added: "You did not bring me out here this afternoon just because you were crazy for your sister's company, you know. Don't forget that I *am* your sister."

He turned his head and shot a swift glance at Betty. His eyes glowed appreciatively, and the corners of his mouth twitched with a glimmer of amusement.

"Quite right, Betty," he said—and drove on again in silence.

* This story began in The Cavalier for February 28.

"I reckon I already know the drift of what you want to say," she went on; "but I will wait for you to say it, just the same."

"You see," he remarked, after another short period of silence, "there is never an opportunity for a word alone with you at Harvard's house. Kitten or Harvard himself, or that everlasting and ever-present Bolton, the butler—one of them is always butting in. Or, if it is not one of them, it is that new maid whom, you tell me, Kitten has engaged only since your arrival."

"A brother and sister aren't supposed to have state secrets to discuss, Ben," his sister said, with a toss of her head. Then she half-turned in her seat and demanded:

"Say it, Ben, whatever it is? You did not send for me to come north, for any other purpose than to make use of me. I know that perfectly well. Now—what is the use to which you intend (if you can) to put me?"

He shrugged. Then, although he still looked straight ahead of him over the steering-wheel, he smiled. A moment later he chuckled audibly.

"You are so sudden," he derided her, and laughed aloud.

Then, sharply, and with unexpected directness, he announced: "I am here to win Kitten away from Bingham Harvard, whom she calls her husband. And I am going to do it. And *you*, Betty, are going to help me."

"I knew that that was about what you were going to say, Ben," his sister replied, with slow deliberateness.

"This is my answer: I would sooner see you tied down on a white ant-hill and slowly devoured."

"I haven't a doubt of it, Betty," he replied, with another shrug. "But, you see, I know you better than you know yourself. If I were tied down as you say you would cut the cords, all right.

"And you will help me to sever the bonds that hold Kitten and Bingham Harvard together, too. You have *got* to do it!"

Betty was silent.

"Haven't you?" he insisted.

"I prefer to hear all that you have to say on the subject before I reply to that question," she said then.

"I accumulated a good deal of money while I was in China, Betty," he stated, with an abrupt change of subject.

"*Were* you in China?" she demanded, without raising her voice, and with her head turned so that she was gazing out across the Sound.

"Naturally—since I tell you so. I brought back a small fortune with me, too. It is in cash, and is therefore available. I can afford to give you as much as fifty thousand dollars of it, Betty—if you want it badly enough to do as I say."

"So my affectionate, sisterly services are to be purchased, are they?"

"If you prefer to put it in that way—yes."

"Suppose I decline the proposition?"

"I think I know you well enough to feel assured that you will not—*quite dare*—to do that."

He half-turned his head and looked straight at Betty when he used the two threatening words.

"And I know myself well enough to be able to assure you that I can, and will, make you accept it, dear sister."

"Kittie hates you, Ben."

"She *thinks* she does—when I am not present. It is quite the contrary whenever I am in touch of her. She is a little bit afraid of me, that's all—and she doesn't quite know what it is that she is afraid of.

"She has not studied it, because she has feared to do so. She flutters about like a bird in a cage when I am near to her. She flushes and pales; she tries to escape, but inevitably returns; she avoids my eyes all she can, but always I can draw them back to mine; she catches her breath, she breathes quickly or slowly, as I will her to do.

"She feels, all in the same instant, the impulse to strike me dead at her

feet and to fly into my arms and to lie there. She cannot commit the former act; she will—she *must*—do the latter."

"Ben"—Betty turned to her brother with sudden earnestness—"Kitty is happy now. She loves her husband. She adores him. He is her idol, her world. Go away and leave her alone, won't you? Please!"

He laughed harshly.

"Go away and leave her to another man—to *that* other man, who, in spite of every concentrated energy and effort of my soul, won her away from me!

"Go away and leave her to the man who took possession of her, owned her, and held her in his arms, and won her caresses and her embraces, while I was absent?" Benton Keese cried, his handsome face dark with anger, his eyes flaming with sullen, smoldering fires.

He guided the car to the side of the road and stopped it. He half turned in his seat to face his sister. The sinister beauty of his shapely features was never more remarkable than when he was in one of his fits of passionate temper.

"Do you know me so little as to expect that, Elizabeth?" he asked, smiling cruelly. "Did you ever know me to relent after I had once determined upon a projected course? Don't you know that I would sacrifice everything—you, and even Kitten herself in the end—to win her *now?*"

Betty shrank away from him in spite of the fact that she believed that she knew him better, and therefore feared him less, than others did.

She trembled inwardly, wide-eyed and frightened. She could see, through the smoldering glare of his eyes, the devil that dwelt inside of him.

It had always been there. Their own father, now dead, had been afraid to arouse it. Their mother had dreaded it and had always been frightened by it. The negroes had called him "that little devil" when he was a boy.

Betty could remember, when she was five and he was fifteen, how he had shocked her and filled her with horror by acts of cruelty that he had committed, and how frequently, and almost in the next moment, he had won her again with kindnesses and by the power of his strange personality.

She was not afraid for herself, but she was frightened—terribly frightened—for Katherine, and it was because she did know her brother so well, because she understood his subtle power to charm, and realized his daring.

But all of the subtlety that had descended from the Keese ancestors had not been bestowed upon Benton. Betty had inherited some of it herself.

She had no thought other than to be unswervingly loyal to her friend; but she knew, also, that she could not successfully battle against her brother in the open, even in the service of Katherine.

She was well aware that to combat him she must meet him on his own ground, in his own way, and that she would have to be as subtle, as far-seeing, and as resourceful as he was.

So, when that momentary burst of passion had swept over him and spent itself, she asked him quietly:

"What do you want me to do, Ben?"

He started the car ahead before he replied.

"I don't know—yet," he said after an interval. "But I must know that I can depend upon you. When the time comes to act you must be ready to act with me and for me.

"No matter what the emergency may be, I must know that you will stand with me through it and to the end of it."

"Ben," Betty entreated, "you will not use—you will not attempt to compel Kittie to go away with— Oh, dear—*you must not—*"

He interrupted her calmly.

"I will use persuasion to the limit," he said deliberately. "If that fails I

will employ other and more certain methods. And you must help, if it comes to that."

"Ben"—she reached out and rested one hand lightly upon his arm—"don't you know that Bingham Harvard will kill you in the end, no matter *how* you may accomplish what you have started out to do? No matter even if you fail at the last? Don't you know that he will kill you, even if you have *tried* and have failed?"

He shrugged and did not answer.

"Do you know anything about the history of Bingham Harvard?" his sister asked him.

"I know *all* about it. I know *everything* about it."

"Are you sure? Do you know all about him when he was called '*Alias the Night Wind*'?"

"Yes; and if he were ten thousand *Night Winds* rolled into one, the fact would make no difference. I want *her*—his *wife*. And I'm going to *get* her. And, if I have to kill *him* in order to do it, why—I will kill him; that's all."

"My God, Benton—"

"No heroics, if you please, Elizabeth."

"Have you been told about the terrible strength of the man, and of his awful temper, when it is aroused? Do you know about—"

"I tell you I know *all* about him; everything. And you know mighty little about your beloved brother, if you think that you can frighten me. Now, listen to *me* for a moment."

"Well?" Betty turned her head away while she listened.

"I have not given myself any too much time to do all that I intend to do. Two weeks—or three, at the most, is all that I care to allow myself. I intend, then, to disappear. And Kitten shall disappear with me. Do you understand that?"

Betty nodded her head affirmatively. She could not have spoken just then.

"Willingly, if she will; by force, if necessary, she shall go away with me. But I think—I intend in the meantime—to compel her to a willingness, if not to an eagerness, to escape from Harvard, and to go anywhere, even to the uttermost ends of the earth, with me.

"Do you understand *that?* If you do not, I won't explain. If you do, you need not think too much about it.

"But my plans are made. I shall carry them out to the end. I waited too long a time for Katherine Maxwilton to let any consideration for Katherine Harvard stand in my way.

"And as for the man who stepped into the ring and caught her when I was not present to prevent it—I will find a way to be damned well rid of him, after I have—" He stopped.

"Have done what?" Betty asked, breathlessly.

Keese replied slowly, his eyes boring into his sister's as he did so:

"After I have taken possession of what belongs to me. After I have made her mine; and when she would not go back to Harvard even if he would take her back—why, then I'll either kill him or have him killed; one or the other.

"There won't be room enough in the world for both of us, afterward."

CHAPTER XIX.

An Elemental Puzzle.

LADY KATE and Tom Clancy left the bank together.

Tom's car, that had taken him there, waited at the door directly behind Katherine's. But he dismissed his own and followed Katherine into the limousine after a nod of friendly greeting to Black Julius, who had been her faithful servitor since her childhood, and who sat like an ebony statue under the steering-wheel.

"Katherine," Tom said when they were seated side by side and the car was headed up-town, "I am in love. I—er—don't suppose it surprises you so very much to hear me say that, does it?"

Lady Kate threw a bright smile at him and replied gently:

"It does not surprise me at all, Tom; and it pleases me greatly. Why, it has been printed all over you as big as a signboard ever since the moment you looked into Betty's eyes.

"I knew even then that the little god had made a bull's-eye. To tell you the truth, I rather thought it would be so, from the moment I knew that Betty was coming."

Tom nodded his head with silent emphasis. Presently he said:

"Cupid does not always shoot both ways at once, does he?"

"Meaning—?" she inquired, raising her brows.

"Meaning this, Katherine: I am wondering if the little chap scored a bull's-eye *for* me, as well as *on* me?"

"Faint heart, Tom; you know the rest of it."

"Sure. And I'm not faint-hearted; you know that. And I am not worrying particularly about that other bull's-eye, either, for I mean that it shall be one before very long, if it isn't so already. So there!" he concluded with a light laugh.

"Modesty is not your hazard, at all events," she returned, smiling again.

"Katherine"—he turned his head and looked straight into her eyes—"I am in love with Betty Keese. I knew I was in love with her before I had walked a block that morning after I left you two at the entrance to the Pennsylvania station.

"I know, too, that a man doesn't get it in the neck—I mean in the heart, of course—like that, without the shock being mutual; or reasonably close to mutuality, anyhow."

"Modesty, Tom, as I have already observed—"

"Never mind the 'modesty' part of it, Katherine. There isn't any of *that* kind of modesty in the game, when a chap is in love—the way I am.

"But the circumstances, take it all in all, places me in rather a peculiar position toward you. That is what I am leading up to, Mrs. Bingham Harvard, if anybody should ride in on a biplane and ask you."

"Toward me?" Katherine stared at him in entire uncomprehension.

"Uh-huh." He nodded. Then he grinned. "When you introduced me to Betty you said that she was a sister in everything but the blood-tie. You stated, also, if I remember correctly, that she stood in the same relation to you that I do to Bing.

"Well, then, if Betty and you are sisters, and, by the same axiom if Bing and I are brothers, that makes *you* my *double-sister*, doesn't it?"

"You are not very clear, Tom, but I will admit that it does, in order to hear what more you may have to offer on the point."

Tom absently took a cigar from his pocket, bit off the end of it, returned it to his waistcoat, and replied:

"I am going to talk to you, Katherine, exactly as if you actually were my sister; precisely from the standpoint of a real brother. If you do not happen to like what I say—you won't like it; that's all.

"It begins with this statement: That brother of Betty's is *not* a healthful and wholesome chap to have around your fireside."

Katherine's lips parted. Her eyes dilated with surprise. She was on the point of replying when he interrupted her.

"Wait a moment, little lady," he said. "Let me get this out of my system before you butt in. If I were not exactly what I am, to you, and to Bing—and, I guess, to Betty, too—I don't suppose that I would have seen or noticed a thing. But, being just what I am, to all of you, I get a view-point from four sides at once. See?"

She made no reply, and he went on:

"I take a squint at Benton Keese—and I see a whole lot. I throw a side-glance at Betty, when she is not aware of it, and when she is stealing a look at her precious brother—and I see a whole lot more. I turn my eyes in

your direction, and—well—I read another hidden chapter.

"Then, Katherine, when I make a composite, mental picture of the whole shooting match I'm scared stiff. And it is not that handsome he-cat that scares me, nor what I read in Betty's mind. It's *you.*"

"I?"

"Yes. You are afraid of him. I wouldn't dare to say this if I weren't your 'double-brother.' But you *are* afraid of Benton Keese. And you are not one to be afraid of anything without good and sufficient reason.

"Now, little lady, I want you to forget everything except that I am just what I am to you and Bing, and tell me exactly what it is that you are afraid of. Wh-e-e-ew! Maybe you think it did not take some courage to get that off my chest!"

His attempt at levity passed unnoticed.

Katherine stared straight ahead of her at nothing during a considerable interval before she replied. Then she said, almost inaudibly, hesitatingly:

"I—do not—know."

"You admit that you are afraid of him?"

"N-no. Not exactly that. No; I am not afraid of him." She still spoke in a low tone, and with evident hesitancy; but it was the hesitation of uncertainly, not of reluctance.

"Then—what is it?"

"I don't know, Tom." Katherine's eyes still stared straight ahead of her.

"You do know, don't you, that the man is madly in love with you? His kind of love?"

"His kind of love—yes." She nodded with conviction. "Only — I do not know the kind. It is utterly strange to me. It always frightened me. My fear of him—if it *is* fear that I feel—must be due to the force of habit. I can account for it in no other way, Tom."

"Habit?"

"I *was* afraid of him, always, when I was a child. I dreaded his presence —and flew into it the instant he appeared. He is five years older than Betty is—than I am. When I was five and he was ten, I was horribly afraid of him. When I was ten and he was fifteen, it was the same, only more so. But he fascinated me, always, if he chose to do so."

"And—does so, now?"

"No. Not that—unless it may be that form of abnormal fascination which is attracted by things that are most repulsive."

"How was it when you were still older? When you were fifteen and he was twenty? And afterward, until your parents wanted you to marry him, and you ran away?"

Katherine turned her eyes to Tom's for the first time since the beginning of the subject.

"I hated him," she said with half-breathless vehemence. "He made my flesh creep, and my hands cold, and my cheeks flush—and my heart throb with anger, every time he looked at me. He had a way with him that—"

"Please go on," said Tom.

"I can't. I don't know how to continue. It is all so inexplicable."

"He has that way with him still, has he not, when he is near you? When he looks at you?"

"I am — afraid — that he has— Tom."

"How does it affect you? Can you tell me that much?"

"No. I do not know. It is a mixture of retraction and repulsion; of liking and of loathing. It attracts me by its very balefulness. It is utterly fearsome while it fascinates.

"It is like looking into the vortex of a terrific conflagration and longing to approach it for a nearer view, yet knowing that the touch of it will consume and destroy. Do you understand it, Tom? Can you explain it for me?"

"Is it, do you think, a form of hypnotic influence?" he asked, without replying to her question.

But she shook her head instantly and with decision.

"It is not that," she said. "It is not even mental suggestion. It is not mental at all. It is not physical. Mentally, physically, spiritually, I utterly loathe the man. It is primordial; elemental. It is—" She stopped again.

"Well?" Tom encouraged her.

"Tom Clancy, if there were such a thing as reincarnation — if I could accept the theory of a preexistence—I would readily believe that Benton Keese and I had known each other, and loved or hated each other, then; and that one of us had murdered the other; and that (I almost hate myself for saying it, even to you, Tom) history is trying now to repeat itself.

"He attracts me, he pulls me, he draws me to him, in spite of myself, but the impulse that is upon me at such moments is to strike, to destroy, to *kill.*"

"Good God, Katherine!" Clancy exclaimed, astounded.

"I tell you it is elemental. And it is nothing that is even remotely akin to love, or that ever could have been, even in that chimerical past existence. It is hate — diabolical, relentless, chaotic, destroying hate.

"Love is one great extremity of life. Hate is the other—its opposite. The second is as positive in its attraction as the first."

"By Jove!" Tom said under his breath and leaned back against the cushions.

Then: "The danger is not exactly what I feared it might be, little lady, but it is just as great—or greater, even. For, take it from me, Katherine, it is not the second one of those two extremes that *he* feels. It is the first one.

"He is the one who is in danger; not you. And upon my word, just now when you said what you did, you looked—and spoke, too—as if you might strike and destroy and kill if he should ever thrust himself across the dividing line."

Katherine bent nearer to him. She rested one hand gently upon his arm. She spoke with intense earnestness.

"You have opened my eyes, Tom," she said quietly. "You have made me understand at last what it is that I fear. I am afraid that he will attempt to cross that dividing line and that the elemental feminine within me will destroy him if he does so."

The car drew up at the curb in front of Katherine's home and stopped. Another that had approached from the opposite direction did the same at the identical moment. As they stepped down to the pavement Benton Keese and Betty did likewise from the other.

The four entered the house together.

CHAPTER XX.

The Sweetest Story Ever Told.

"MISS BETTY, were you ever in love?"

Tom asked the question softly. Betty was seated at the piano with her fingers running lightly over the keys and improvising the harmony they produced.

Her shapely chin was tilted slightly upward so that her exquisite face was in full view of his devouring eyes and her lips were parted in a half smile which set her dimples a winking mischievously.

"Oh, heaps of time!" she assured him roguishly. "I cannot even remember all of the times."

"In that case," Tom said with calm conviction, "you will know exactly how to sympathize with a poor chap who suddenly finds himself in that predicament."

"Is it a predicament?" Betty inquired archly, while her fingers strayed into the refrain of a love-song.

"Quite so." Tom nodded his head with undoubted emphasis. But he held to his position at the end of the piano and nothing in his attitude or manner betrayed the earnestness of his words.

He wondered if Betty intended that the air she was playing to be significant of her attitude—or if she was merely making fun of him.

Benton Keese, at the far end of the room, was idly turning the loose leaves of a portfolio. Both he and Tom had been asked to remain for dinner, and the arrival of Bingham Harvard was momentarily expected. Katherine was temporarily absent from the room.

Betty played on for a time without response. Then—

"Who is the poor chap to whom you refer?" she asked, bending slightly forward over the keyboard—but not so far as to prevent Tom from seeing the deeper color that had flooded the shapely cheek and chin.

"I am," he replied boldly, still holding to his distance—but doing it with evident difficulty, as the enforced rigidity of his upright pose sufficiently demonstrated.

Betty's fingers strayed again. This time they touched upon another old-time melody which everybody whistled and sang only a few years ago.

"Love me, and the world is mine," Betty's fingers said to him; and he had the almost ungovernable impulse to seize upon her, to lift her from the piano stool, and to crush her warm and supple body against his own. But he succeeded in resisting it.

She was silent again until she had played nearly through the once popular song. Then, with face and eyes averted, she asked, in so low a tone that he barely heard the words:

"Who—is—the—the other one?"

"You are," he replied instantly.

Crash! Betty's slender fingers fell upon chord after chord of harmony, each one softer and yet fuller than that which had preceded it, and her tapering, dainty fingers, directed by her whimsical but receptive mood, modulated from key to key until with the delicacy of a subconscious thought they drifted into the air of De Koven's "Oh, promise me!"

She bent still lower over the piano while her hands found the notes that seemed to be intended for her answer to him.

Tom Clancy's face became, for an instant, as pale as wax. He held himself in hand with difficulty. It was hardly possible to mistake her meaning, then.

"Do you mean it, Betty?" he demanded breathlessly, bending a trifle nearer to her in spite of himself. "Do you mean it, dear?" he went on, recovering in part his mental equilibrium, and stoically condemning himself not to betray by a single act the near-tragedy of the situation.

For he knew, without looking in that direction, that the eyes of Benton Keese were watching them, and he realized that what Katherine had been enabled to see so plainly must also have been discernible to Betty's keenly observant brother.

"Do you mean all that the music tells me?" he asked yet again. "I know that it is awfully soon for me to tell you about it; but—but—I *could* have told you the very same thing even before I let go of your hand the first time I ever saw you, down at the Pennsylvania station.

"I knew it then; right then. Honest, I did. And I told Katherine all about it only a few minutes ago, while Julius was bringing us here in the car.

"And *she* thought that — maybe— you liked me a *little* bit, you know. Betty, won't you look at me, please? Won't you raise your eyes to mine just once, if it's only for an instant? I'll fly into little pieces in a moment more, if you don't. My heart is swelling so that it will explode like a stick of dynamite in another minute unless you look at me, or say something.

"I love you, little Betty; with all my heart and soul and strength I love you. And you know it, too. You *have* known it as well as I have, since three days ago, when *I* found it out, all in a blessed minute."

She did not look at him, just then, in response to his plea. She did not dare. Possibly she realized that if she did so, she would, herself, betray to her vigilant brother the very thing that Tom was trying so hard to conceal.

But her fingers strayed over the piano keys into the melody of a still older song—"Because it's you"; and he mentally repeated the first verse of it in response to the touch of her singing fingers:

"If I could have my dearest wish fulfilled,
And take my choice of all earth's treasures, too;
And ask of Heaven whatsoe'er I willed—
I'd ask for *you*."

"Betty! Oh, Betty!" he fairly gasped in the excess of his pent-up emotions. "Is that your answer? *Is* it? Tell me. Look up at me and tell me, or I will—"

She obeyed him.

Her eyes, moist, limpid, yet wondrously alight and shining through the love-mist in them, sought his own, found them, and rested there for a moment, rapturously.

He read her answer there, in the warm glow of them, in the flush upon her cheeks, in the slightly parted lips, in her quickened breathing, in the suffusing warmth of her pulsing nearness—and in his own hammering heartbeats which responded so utterly.

Tom Clancy *knew*, then. There was no need for Betty to speak.

A great sigh of supreme content welled within him. The great impulse of conviction, of certainty, overwhelmed him—and steadied him, too. And again, while he struggled to contain himself, Betty's fingers sought out and repeated to him the last bars of "It is the sweetest story ever told."

It was almost too much.

There is no telling what might have happened then had not an interruption occurred.

The door opened and Bingham Harvard came into the room. Katherine was beside him.

Betty swung the stool around so that she faced away from Tom—whose eyes she dared not meet again just then—and left the piano. Benton Keese got lazily upon his feet in greeting. Clancy crossed the room quickly and drew Lady Kate aside, leading her away from the others, so that, for her ears alone, he might safely turn on the "exhaust."

He felt that some sort of a safety valve had to "pop," or that he would burst with the wonder of it all.

"I've told her, Katherine," he whispered fiercely. "I've won. I have got her—or she has got me; or— Oh, I don't know what to say. It is all right, anyhow. Glory be, Lady Kate! I am the happiest man outside of heaven."

"Do you mean to tell me, Tom Clancy, that you have been proposing to Betty right here in this room, in the presence of her brother?" Katherine asked composedly.

"Uh-huh. Honest. I couldn't help it. It just had to come out—over there by the piano. And she, bless her dear heart! answered me with her fingers."

"Really? I did not know that either of you understood the deaf and dumb alpha—"

"Deaf and dumb nothing! She *played* to me. And then, after a little, she *looked* at me. Say, Lady, I've got to hug somebody. Can't I hug you? Eh?

"Or—I'll tell you what! You go over there where *she* is, and take her aside, and put your arms around her, and kiss her on both cheeks, for me, will you. And you tell her in a whisper to look over your shoulder at me while you are doing it.

"Go on! Please! I *want* you to. Good heavens, Katherine, what a wonderful thing it is, isn't it?"

But Katherine had already turned away to do his bidding.

Tom watched her. He saw her put an arm around Betty and draw her aside just as Harvard left the room to seek his own. For the moment Tom forgot that Benton Keese was somewhere behind him.

He had eyes only for Betty, who was at that instant peering at him over Katherine's shoulder. And her own eyes sparkled wondrously, her cheeks were red and rosy, her lips were part-

ed ever so little in a half-roguish smile which Tom thought was the most bewitching and alluring thing he had ever seen.

He could scarcely contain himself. He was tense in his attitude, poised, and with his body bent slightly forward as if he were on the very point of leaping forward to seize her.

And then he was jerked back to earth again with a jar and a shock that suddenly aroused every impulse of fierce resentment that was in him. The quiet, insinuating, perfectly modulated voice of Benton Keese spoke to him from directly behind.

"You are a regular steeple-chaser in your love-hunting—eh, Clancy? And you take hurdles and blind ditches without a thought of the consequences, I observe," Keese said.

"That was an entertaining tableau at the piano; and very prettily done. But, Betty always does it to perfection. God knows that she has had practise enough."

CHAPTER XXI.

Again That Chilton Picture.

CLANCY controlled the angry impulse he felt, even while he turned about to face Benton Keese; and he compelled himself to perform that act very slowly indeed. Tom's impetuosity was a good deal like Theodore Roosevelt's; his brain thought much more quickly, always, than he acted.

"It *was* rather well done, wasn't it?" he replied genially. "I thought so myself."

Keese nodded, a slow smile twitching at the corners of his mouth, his eyes glowing inscrutably.

"If you perhaps had been supplied with a harmonica, Clancy, the scene would have been almost a wordless recitative," he said. "But I suspect that *you* are very much in earnest—most men are when they run up against Betty—and so I suggest that you use your glasses to study the field a bit carefully before you take *all* of the jumps."

Tom's eyes narrowed. Lady Kate and Betty, with their arms around each other, were crossing the room toward them. He replied rapidly, and in a low tone:

"Your metaphor, Mr. Keese, reminds me that in the hunting field one is more prone to warn another rider of danger, when he sees ahead of him a bad jump for his own mount. To stick to the metaphor, 'Look out that you don't fetch a cropper yourself.'"

Keese shrugged his shoulders, and there was a strange and ominous gleam in the depths of his red-brown eyes as he replied, showing his white teeth as he said it:

"Oh, my mount will take me safely over. I fear only for those who may foolishly attempt to follow me. We were speaking of the hunting-field, Betty," he added lazily to his sister. "I was telling Mr. Clancy about that old trick of yours of leading the chase to the most dangerous jumps, and then faulting—so that you might safely jeer at your pursuers when they floundered in the ditch."

The double meaning of what he said compelled itself upon each of his listeners, although they were differently impressed. And Keese, who flew from one conversational twig to another with the ease and cocksureness of a sparrow, added:

"All of which reminds me that it has been a long time since I rode to hounds. And I pine for it. Really."

Harvard returned to the room at that instant, and, hearing what was said, replied instantly:

"The Forestbrook club will hold a meet this coming Thursday, Mr. Keese. Katherine will be glad to attend, I know; and I guess that Tom can do the honors of the day. Unfortunately I won't be able to go myself. But I can join you later; in time for the dinner."

"I should like it very much, in-

deed," Keese replied readily. "Nothing would please me more than that."

"And you, Miss Betty?" Bingham asked.

"Oh, I should just love it!"

"And you, Tom? Can you manage it to act as host for that day?"

"Sure. I'll declare a bank-holiday, so far as I am concerned."

"And we can fit you out with mounts, and everything that is needed," Harvard added, "so we will declare it settled."

Until dinner was served, during it, and afterward, Tom Clancy found not a single moment or opportunity for a word alone with Betty, although he resorted to every expedient he could think of, or create, in order to accomplish it.

He was perfectly aware that Betty sought to avoid it, too; but not, he readily surmised, because she dreaded it or even wished to postpone it, but on account of the proximity of her brother, and his evident understanding of the situation.

Their eyes sought each other's frequently, nevertheless, and flashes of entire comprehension of the occasion were exchanged between them.

Katherine watched them demurely, and wondered how either of them could suppose that the situation was not thoroughly understood by Betty's brother and her own husband. The truth she thought was plainly enough depicted upon the faces and in the eyes of the lovers whenever their glances met.

In the library, after the informal meal, Benton Keese sought the company of Bingham Harvard, and they chatted together upon various topics, until the young bank president remarked, apropos of nothing in particular:

"It is rather odd, Mr. Keese, that ever since your first appearance among us I have had the strange sensation of having met you before, somewhere — although I know quite well that it cannot be so."

"Indeed?" Keese replied indifferently. "It is, I suppose, some vague resemblance to another, whom you have encountered somewhere; and yet, that other man may not at all resemble me, nor I him."

"Quite so," Harvard assented, nodding.

"It is the old Oliver Wendell Holmes idea that when John and Thomas meet and converse six people are talking: John, as John thinks he is; John as Thomas thinks he is; and John as God *knows* he is—and so on, vice versa, et cetera, and all the rest of it. Eh?"

"Doubtless. My lifelong bank-training has taught me to remember personalities, rather than faces and features. It is something about your personality that seems familiar to me."

"Oh! I see. Well, I think I can account for that, Harvard. It is quite simple."

"Yes?"

"It is the personality of the Southerner. We are all very much alike in many of our characteristics, you know, no matter how greatly we may differ in the concrete. All Southerners possess identical traits which are never entirely eradicated in another environment.

"For example: your wife and I were raised—as we express it—in the same county and among the same people. Practically, although I am older, as you know, we were children and playmates together; and so the familiar notes that I have struck in your memory are the harmonizing notes of Fayette County, Kentucky, which constant association with Katherine has taught you to recognize."

"Probably that accounts for it," Harvard admitted, impressed by the suggestion—yet unconvinced, although he did not say so; and at that moment there came an interruption.

Betty had been idly turning the leaves of a book that was spread open upon her lap, and listening abstractly to the conversation between Kather-

ine and Tom, who were seated near her. She had heard Tom ask to be shown again a small photograph, which Katherine presently gave to him.

Then, as their heads came nearer together, to look at it, she, too, bent forward to see what it was. And then she saw that they were not really looking upon the picture, but into each other's eyes, studiously, earnestly, thoughtfully, as if each were mutely asking a question of the other—and as if each declined to express any sort of a reply.

The first glance that Betty had of the photograph, slanting and distant, so that the pose, rather than the costume and features depicted in the picture, impressed her, made her start and bend still nearer, in order to look more closely upon it.

"Why," she exclaimed, "I thought at first that it was a picture of—but of course it isn't. I can see that now." She reached out a hand, and Tom, who held the picture, gave it to her.

"Oh, no!" she said. "I can see now that it isn't in the least bit like him. But what an odd costume! Mexican, isn't it?"

She studied it in silence for a moment, and both Tom and Katherine watched her narrowly, perhaps unconsciously — perhaps also intentionally. Then Betty called to her brother.

"Benton, come here a moment!" she said, and rose to meet him halfway. And that was the interruption referred to.

Clancy rose also and rested an elbow upon a near-by, high-backed chair. Katherine retained her seat, but bent forward slightly upon it, with her eyes fixed intently upon Benton Keese as he came forward to meet his sister. Harvard raised his own eyes indifferently.

"Were you ever in Mexico, Ben?" Betty asked, with scarcely a pause between her summons to him and the question. "Look!" She thrust the picture forward under his eyes. "I really thought, for just an instant, that it was you."

"I?" Keese replied smilingly, and, reached out to take possession of the small photograph, but making no haste to look upon it. "I never knowingly have had my picture taken since I wore knickerbockers," he commented generally to all of them. And he permitted his gaze to rest for the briefest instant upon each face in turn before he dropped it to the photograph of Holbrook Chilton that Betty had put into his hand.

"Why, upon my word!" he exclaimed at once, and with half-excited earnestness when he did look upon it.

Then he looked again at his sister. "How did you come by this, Betty?" he asked sharply. "Where did you get it?"

"Kittie had it. T — Mr. Clancy just now asked her for it. I leaned over to see what it was, and in the very first glance there was something about it that made me think it was you."

"Oh, yes! Of course. Just because we are so different, I suppose," her brother remarked with irony.

Harvard's indifferent glance had become tense. He left his chair and stepped forward nearer to them. Keese was apparently interested in a closer study of the picture, and there was a vaguely reminiscent smile upon his face as he did so.

"Do you know the gentleman, Mr. Keese?" Harvard inquired calmly.

"Know him? Most certainly I know him — or, rather, I *did* know him some years ago. That is a picture of Holbrook Chilton, or else I am very greatly mistaken," and Benton Keese stared straight into Harvard's eyes, as if daring him to deny the statement.

"You are quite right. It is a picture of Holbrook Chilton," Harvard said—and smiled.

"Sure! I knew that I could not be mistaken, although the costume does

change him mightily. But it is the same man without a doubt. Is he a friend of yours by any odd chance, Harvard?" He turned toward Lady Kate. "Or of yours, Katherine?"

"He is an acquaintance of mine—and of Clancy's," Harvard interposed before his wife could reply. "May I ask if you have seen him recently? Since your return to this country?"

"Oh, no! In fact, I have not seen or heard from him but once since before I went to China; and even then he was merely a passing acquaintance, so to speak. But I liked the man very much indeed, considering how short a time I really knew him."

"Have you any idea of his present address, Mr. Keese?"

"No. I was on the point of asking you the same question. You see, we traveled together in the same Pullman—in the same section, in fact, for he had the upper and I the lower berth—from New Orleans to Los Angeles.

"I was on my way to California, with no especial object in view. His destination at the time was Guaymas, in Mexico; and, if I remember correctly, his plans for the future were about as indefinite as my own. We parted after a few days spent together in Los Angeles."

"You have heard from him since then, you say?"

"Once; yes. It was before I sailed from San Francisco. I received a letter from him at the hotel address I had given him there. It was postmarked at Guaymas. I replied to it rather hastily I suppose, and told him that I was leaving for China.

"Later I wrote to him from Singapore, but I never received a reply to that letter, either. In fact, I had entirely forgotten him until I saw this picture.

"It is a remarkably clear likeness as I remember him—barring the costume, of course. Still, I would have recognized it anywhere."

"I am quite anxious to know where he can be found," Harvard said, turning and resuming the chair he had vacated.

"I am afraid that I cannot help you in that respect," Keese replied thoughtfully and with evident concern. "We were merely traveling acquaintances, you know, and neither of us was much given to personal confidences. I told him that I was a Kentuckian and he replied that he was a Virginian; but I have no idea what part of Virginia he came from."

Betty supplied a suggestion then.

"It was probably Westmoreland County, Benton," she said, wrinkling her brows thoughtfully. "I remember that papa used to correspond with a man who come from there, whose name was Holbrook; and I have a vague recollection of hearing him mention the name of Chilton, too, although I think he referred to another person when he did that."

Keese nodded.

"Possibly," he assented indifferently. "I have some faint remembrance of the sort myself; only it isn't at all definite. However"—he also resumed his chair—"one might readily find out, I suppose, by writing to several of the local postmasters in that locality.

"That is"—he turned smilingly toward Harvard again—"if you are so very anxious to know about him. Everybody knows everybody else, and who their grandfathers and grandmothers were, in the rural districts of the South. It is odd, isn't it, that I should find a picture of him here?"

"Quite so," Tom Clancy said dryly. "To make use of an expression that is frightfully trite, the world is a small place—when one makes the effort to disappear."

"Oh!" said Keese. "Did Chilton do that? Did he have a reason for doing it? Is that—er—the reason why you-all are so anxious to find him? I should suppose, if he sent that photograph to you, Harvard—"

He halted in his speech suggestively, but Harvard did not supply the

further information as to the source of the photograph.

"It was taken, I think, by a friend and without his knowledge," Lady Kate announced. She was still bending forward, with her chin resting in the hollow of one hand, and her eyes throughout the conversation concerning Chilton had not once wavered from her close regard of Benton Keese, although he seemed to be entirely unconscious of the fact.

Then, rising and crossing to a chair beside her husband, she added indifferently: "Why did the picture remind you of Benton, Betty?"

"Really, I don't know, dear," Betty replied thoughtfully, "for it isn't at all like him when one comes to look closely at it. I think it was something in the pose or in the poise of the head."

"Probably that is what impressed me also," Katherine said absently; and Clancy, who was in the act of occupying a chair beside one that Betty had taken, nodded and murmured:

"Me, too," which was more expressive than grammatical.

Keese, who still held the photograph, reached out and put it down upon the library-table, and Harvard picked it up and began to study it closely.

Just at that moment the door was opened, and Bolton appeared at the threshold, where he stepped aside to permit some one to pass into the room.

"Mr. Anderson Van Cleve," he announced.

CHAPTER XXII.

An Exchange of Warnings.

"MR. VAN CLEVE, let me make you acquainted with Mr. Keese, of Kentucky; but more recently from China. And my friend Miss Keese. We were schoolmates and chums all our lives until I left home to come to New York."

So spoke Lady Kate as she stepped forward to welcome the man from Mexico.

Keese and Van Cleve grasped hands perfunctorily and the latter turned instantly to acknowledge the second introduction; but his keen eyes that were always peculiarly penetrating in their regard, looked deeply into the red-brown ones of Benton Keese, even in that brief interval.

"There is no need to ask if you are sister and brother, Miss Keese," he said genially to Betty, retaining for a moment the hand she gave to him. "The family resemblance is a pronounced one."

He selected a chair after he had shaken hands with Clancy, and as it happened to be the one nearest to Keese, addressed his next remark to him.

"Lately returned from China, have you, Mr. Keese?" he asked politely. His manner was that of one who was merely "making" conversation; and he added, without awaiting a reply: "I have recently returned from Mexico, so we are both 'foreigners,' in a measure. The latter country is about as remote as the former, in all save distance."

"I have never visited Mexico, so I could not pass as an authority on that point," Keese replied.

"Mr. Keese knows our friend Holbrook Chilton," Tom Clancy remarked in a casual tone. "We were just looking at that picture you took of him, in Guerrero, and he recognized it at once."

Van Cleve, whose gaze had transferred itself to Clancy when the latter spoke, returned it again to Keese with an expression of polite surprise.

"Indeed?" he said, mildly. "Chilton was my superintendent and general manager, in Mexico. He was originally a Southerner, like yourself, I believe. From Virginia, I think he told me."

Keese nodded. "Yes; that is what he told me. Mr. Clancy conveyed a wrong impression, I imagine, in his

statement. I do not know Mr. Chilton in the sense that was implied. We were merely traveling acquaintances between New Orleans and Los Angeles, and for a few days after our arrival at the latter place."

"You found him an interesting companion, I have no doubt?" Van Cleve suggested.

"Quite so. I expressed the wish to renew my acquaintance with him, as soon as the photograph restored him to memory. Do you, perhaps, know where he is, now, Mr. Van Cleve?"

"No. Chilton has disappeared—unfortunately. But — I think I shall hear from him again, sometime."

"Mr. Van Cleve," Katherine interposed at that moment, "we had arranged, just before you came, to attend the 'meet' of the Forestbrook Hunt Club, next Thursday. Could you make it possible to be one of us?"

"I am afraid not, Mrs. Harvard, much as I would like to do so. But the fact is—"

"Mr. Van Cleve has an engagement with me for that afternoon, Katherine," Harvard said when his guest hesitated. "But I will take him down with me when *I* go."

He turned to Van Cleve. "I had already agreed to join them in time for the dinner. There is nothing to prevent you from going down with me, is there?"

"No. No, indeed. I shall be very glad to do that after we have transacted our business."

The turn that the conversation had taken reminded Katherine suddenly of a fact that had entirely escaped her until that moment, and the thought of it sent a vivid flush to her face which receded as quickly as it had appeared, and left it, for an instant only, white and scared.

The arrangement, as it stood, paired her — irrevocably paired her — with Benton Keese for the afternoon's cross-country ride; and now, when it was all too late, she realized that there was no possible way to avoid it; at least not without exciting surprise, if not actual comment, from Bingham.

She knew, the moment it occurred to her, that Benton Keese would make every effort to keep close to her during the fox hunt, and notwithstanding the half-confidences that she had exchanged with Clancy and the conversation she had had with Betty on the same topic, she knew that those two would forget everybody else but themselves that day.

Lifting her glance she discovered that Keese was regarding her steadily, and that his eyes were shining stealthily, as if he intended to convey to her a silent message of comprehension which he did not wish the others to observe.

And again the flush leaped into her face. She felt, for the moment, as if she had tacitly accepted the arrangement which, as she now saw clearly, was directly the consequence of Benton Keese's subtle arts.

To her intense relief he left his chair at that moment with the announcement that he must go, much as he regretted to do so; and Clancy, who was torn by several conflicting desires, surrendered to the one which he considered to be his plain duty, and said, as he got upon his feet:

"I'll chase along with you, Keese."

He caught what he chose to consider a reproachful glance from Betty, although in reality it was merely one of surprise; and in another moment the two men were in the street.

"Odd, isn't it, that you should happen to have known Chilton?" Tom remarked after he had lighted a cigar and they were pacing leisurely down the avenue side by side.

"Is it?" Keese replied lazily. He had declined Clancy's offer of a cigar and had lighted an Egyptian cigarette from his own elaborately monogrammed case, the same one that Rushton had seen him make use of in front of the hotel.

At the opposite side of the avenue, unseen by either Clancy or Keese,

Rushton was pacing slowly along after them. He was on the job.

"More odd, still, that your sister, at her first glance at his picture should have fancied that she saw in it some sort of a resemblance to you," Tom continued imperturbably.

"There is no accounting for Betty's fancies, Clancy," Keese replied with a light laugh. "They are as sudden and as changeable as shadows—and just about as substantial; and, in that respect it does not much matter what form they may happen to take."

Keese closed the statement with a little chuckle.

"I suppose," Tom said, "that you mean that remark as a sort of continuance of your metaphor of the hunting field."

Keese shrugged his shoulders.

"I mean it as a kindness, at least, Clancy," he said. "Betty wins hearts in just the same way that she picks wild-flowers in the woods and fields. She holds them for a moment in her hand, admires them—and chucks them aside for fresher ones."

"Is it a—er—family trait, Mr. Keese?"

"Possibly. I had not thought of that. It is, however, Betty's way. So—be on your guard, my friend."

"Thank you," Tom replied solemnly. "I suppose I ought to thank you, and I do. However, to tell you the truth, if I am to accept as fact what you have said in regard to your sister, and if I am to consider you as representing the 'family,' fickle fancy is not a trait; or, if it is, the characteristic was overlooked when you were fashioned."

"Meaning — just what, Mr. Clancy?"

"Nothing; that is, nothing more than this: If I read you correctly—and for some unexplained reason I think I do—you are one who is very far indeed from being fickle. In fact, it would not surprise me at all if you were to expand at this moment into a burst of confidence and admit to me that you are still madly in love with your *first* love."

"Does your gift of penetration go so far as to suggest who the 'first' love may have been, Mr. Clancy?"

"Quite so. A blind man could see that, you know."

There was an interval of silence which it was evident that Keese did not intend to break of his own accord, and then Tom added, speaking in an apparently careless tone:

"You see we are even now. You were kind enough to warn me, a moment ago, lest I might cast my bread upon waters that would not give it back. And so, gentle sir—my friend, as you addressed *me* — I feel it my duty to return the compliment."

Keese came to a full stop. Tom had won his point. He had succeeded in wounding the heel of Achilles. He had touched a spot which aroused the fiery Southern temper of Benton Keese.

"What the devil do you mean by that?" Keese demanded hotly. Then, before Tom could reply, or had made an effort to do so, he laughed aloud, resumed his way down the avenue, and added, with a well-assumed appearance of forced cordiality:

"Moths like ourselves, Clancy, delight to singe their wings, provided only that the fire is hot enough to suit us.

"Dear me! Here we are at Fifty-Ninth Street, and I must leave you. Many thanks for the implied warning, old chap; only, really you know, it wasn't necessary.

"And I am afraid — very much afraid indeed!—that in your case, it was, and is, quite important that you should heed mine."

CHAPTER XXIII.

Bingham Harvard's Quiet Way.

"BINGHAM," Van Cleve asked, soon after Lady Kate and Betty had gone from the room for an ex-

change of confidences, following upon the departure of Tom Clancy and Benton Keese, "are you particularly acquainted with the characteristics, traits and mannerisms of Southerners, generally?"

He had lighted a huge, black cigar and was leaning back comfortably in the chair, and his strong, handsome face, eminently patrician in every line of it, expressed nothing more than mild curiosity. Harvard did not smoke.

"I have never known but one intimately," the young banker replied, smilingly, "and that one is Katherine. Why do you ask?"

"*I* have never known any of them intimately," Van Cleve answered. "Unless it was Chilton; and intimacy would hardly be the word to apply to my association with him.

"But, if you had replied to my question in the affirmative, it would have been followed by another one that had occurred to me."

"What is it?"

"This: Does one Southerner whom you meet casually, inevitably remind you, in some inexplicable manner, of others whom you may have known?"

Harvard studied upon the question a moment before he replied. Then he said:

"In the abstract, yes; I think so. I know perfectly well to what you allude, Mr. Van Cleve, and I want to be entirely fair in my reply.

"There *is* something about Benton Keese that touches a familiar note of memory, and the familiar note does, very remotely, suggest Holbrook Chilton. That is what you meant, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"I was impressed by something of the sort the first time I saw him, although I did not then connect it with Chilton. In fact, I had not done so until this evening; and I doubt if it would have occurred to me even tonight had it not been for a remark his sister made to all of us about the photograph."

"What was that?"

"She thought, from a distance—at her first glance, and before she had really seen the picture—that it was her brother."

"Then it was something in the pose, probably, that suggested the thought?"

"Undoubtedly."

"Of course," Van Cleve announced quietly, "it is utterly preposterous for us to connect the two men in more than a contemplative way. But—I think that the effect that Mr. Keese had upon me at the moment I was introduced to him was very much the same as the impression made upon Miss Betty when she first caught sight of the picture."

"I don't think that I exactly understand what you mean, Mr. Van Cleve," Harvard said, wrinkling his brows.

"Shall I be entirely plain?"

"Please."

"The first swift glance that I had of Mr. Keese when we were introduced brought Chilton as forcibly to my mind as if he had been dropped down into the room in front of me; and Holbrook Chilton was as far from my thoughts at the moment as China or Mexico, or the private office at your bank.

"But, as in the case of Miss Betty, the notion was instantly dispelled. It disappeared, utterly; and afterward, although I studied the man covertly and closely, I could discover nothing about him to account for that first impulsive idea."

"You just now suggested that it was something about the pose of the picture which brought the idea into Betty's mind. Was it the pose that suggested it to you, do you think?"

"No."

"What should you say it was?"

"I don't know—unless it was something in his eyes. But, I don't see why we are discussing this question at all. Keese is not Chilton. I am as positive about that as I am that he did, somehow, bring the fellow to mind.

"Besides—" He hesitated.

"Well, Mr. Van Cleve?"

"The whole suggestion is utterly preposterous, as I said before. Benton Keese is the brother of Mrs. Harvard's best friend and life-long associate. Indeed, as I understand it, he was himself a life-long associate of hers."

"The fact remains," Harvard said quietly, "that Benton Keese left his home in Kentucky within a very short time after Katherine came from there to New York—and that was, approximately, about the time of Chilton's appearance in Mexico."

Van Cleve nodded; and he said with a smile:

"That, of course, is a mere coincidence; and also it is partly accounted for by the incident of the meeting between Keese and Chilton in the Pullman car of the Southern Pacific train.

"Then, again — and this had escaped both of us—if there had been any real connection between the two men, Keese would scarcely have permitted himself to recognize, and claim acquaintance with, the original of the picture.

"But, my dear Harvard, it is utter folly for us even to discuss such a thing. Besides, it is an affront to your guest; and to his beautiful sister who is your wife's best friend as well as guest—and to you, also."

"I could not help noticing that you were studying the man," Harvard said, ignoring the last remark of Van Cleve's.

"I hope that *he* did not notice it. I was not aware that I made the fact so plain."

"I think," Harvard replied slowly, "that Benton Keese is a man who notices most things that occur in his presence. But if he did notice it the effect upon him could have been only one of two kinds."

"How do you mean, Harvard?"

"He should have been either flattered—or frightened."

"Humph!"

"Flattered by your regard, if he is really nothing more nor less than Benton Keese. And dismayed, if not actually frightened by your close attention to him, in case he *has* been masquerading as one Holbrook Chilton of our mutual acquaintance."

"Good Lord, Bingham! You don't for a moment think that possible, do you?" Van Cleve fairly gasped the question.

"No." Harvard replied with deliberation; and he added, carefully selecting his words: "No. I do *not* think that. And yet, barring your non-recognition of him — and mine also—the situation is just possible."

Van Cleve was about to reply, but Harvard went on quickly:

"Wait a moment, Mr. Van Cleve. I want to make myself entirely plain, if that is possible. You know next to nothing concerning an experience I passed through while I was paying-teller at the bank; and I will not burden you with a recital of it.* You do know enough about it to understand what I shall say."

"Possibly."

"It was a bitter experience, and the fact that in its utmost extremity I discovered Katherine and won her love is its only atonement. But it taught me that things are not always what they seem to be; that circumstances of past associations cannot always be relied upon; that truth is frequently much harder to establish than falsity."

"I think I understand you. It is your idea to give this man the benefit of the doubt—both ways. That remark is a free translation of a Spanish proverb which I have sometimes thought is very apt.

"All the same, it is quite plain to me that you do not like Mr. Benton Keese."

"No. My dislike for him is instinctive rather than actual. In a

* "Alias the Night Wind," to be found in the four issues of THE CAVALIER for May, 1913, or in book form; also "The Return of the Night Wind" in THE CAVALIERS for Oct. 4, 11, 18, 25, and Nov. 1, 1913, and in book form.

measure, too, it is the consequence of a very human prejudice. Keese was formerly a suitor for Katherine's hand in marriage. He had the active support of Katherine's parents—more, I think, because of old family relations and associations than anything else.

"I am telling this to you, Mr. Van Cleve, precisely as I would tell it to Mr. Chester."

"I understand, Bingham."

"There is no doubt of the insistence of his suit. It was because of his perseverance in spite of her negatives, and of the pressure that he induced Katherine's father and mother to put upon her that she fled from them and came to New York."

Van Cleve nodded comprehendingly.

"Neither is there any doubt that Keese was deeply—desperately is possibly a better word to express it—in love with Katherine. Nor can there be any doubt to the mind of one who is ordinarily observant that he is so now."

"Surely you are not—"

Harvard interrupted with quiet laughter.

"Jealous? Hardly that, sir. But the elemental, primitive man inside of me resents the *fact*. You understand that, don't you?"

"Yes."

"I can see, too, that Katherine recognizes it—and resents it much more bitterly than I do. To me it is a condition with which, in an abstract way, I can sympathize; but to her it amounts to very little less than a positive affront.

"I am sure, because I have observed closely, that were it not for the presence of Betty in our home Katherine would find an excuse for not receiving him.

"And — I hope you will not misunderstand me now—I am inclined to believe that Keese brought his sister here from the South purposely to avoid that very exigency."

"It seems to me," Van Cleve remarked uneasily, "that we are drifting away from the original topic, Bingham."

"No. On the contrary I am getting back to it. I told you a little bit ago that from the first meeting with Keese he sounded a note of familiarity in my consciousness."

"Yes."

"I have thought upon it, and studied it constantly, since then, but not once with the most remote suggestion of associating him with Holbrook Chilton—until to-night."

"But, now?"

"Now, beginning with that impulsive exclamation from Betty, and followed by a much more careful observation of the man himself, the association—in my mind at least—is unmistakable; and yet, like yourself, I am entirely unable to put my mental finger upon a single characteristic, gesture, or feature, tone of the voice, glance of the eye or mannerism, that will afford even the vaguest support to the idea.

"And so—pardon me yet another moment—a few questions which possibly you can answer, occur to me."

"We are drifting very far afield, Bingham."

"I know that—and we will either drift farther still, or we will be brought back to the home base for a new start."

"Well, what are the questions you would ask?"

"You were more or less closely associated with the man Chilton for some time. You are observant. Very little escapes you.

"There are certain features about every human being which cannot be thoroughly disguised—or at least that is the claim of criminologists. They are, roughly, the expression, shape, color and habit of using the eyes; the shape of the ears, particularly at the tops, and the lobes, and as to position in relation to the other features; the shape and position of the nose, not in profile, but in full front view, and in the measurements from the tip of it to the lobes of each ear; the lines of the

mouth and the flitting expressions of those lines—not the staid ones.

"Not the outer lines of the lips, which might be concealed temporarily by mustache and beard, but of the mouth itself, which is never entirely concealed.

"A moment ago you referred to the eyes of Benton Keese, and so I ask you—what of them, or of any feature I have named, suggests Chilton?"

"Upon my word, Harvard, save for that vague impression of suggestion which still remains, there is not one expression, one feature, or one mannerism to support the theory," Van Cleve replied with studied conviction.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A Leopard—and His Spots.

ANDERSON VAN CLEVE entered the hotel where he was staying temporarily shortly after eleven. When he called for his key at the desk an envelope was also handed to him. It contained the card of Thomas Clancy.

On the back of it Tom had penciled the following:

DEAR MR. VAN CLEVE:
No matter at what hour you find this card, will you please come to my house to see me before you retire?

T. C.

"How long a time is it since the gentleman was here?" he asked of the clerk who gave him the message; and then remembering that a time stamp would be on the back of the envelope, he turned it over. The clerk replied:

"The envelope was left at the desk by a messenger about an hour ago, sir."

Van Cleve thrust the card and envelope into a pocket and was thoughtful for a moment. He did not perceive that a young man of Jewish appearance who had entered the hotel immediately in his wake, was regarding him furtively.

The young man went out again when he did so and signaled to a second taxi after Van Cleve had summoned one.

Afterward the second taxi followed the first one until it had drawn up before Tom Clancy's home, where the chauffeur of it composed himself in the attitude of awaiting the return of his "fare."

Clancy admitted his caller himself and led him into the library at the rear, where he put forward a box of cigars and other refreshments while he explained the reason for the summons.

"I never would have made a successful diplomat, Mr. Van Cleve," he said, "so I will go straight to the point. I asked you to come here to-night as soon as you returned to your hotel because I believed it necessary that we should discuss a certain person of our acquaintance."

"Keese? Or, Chilton?" Tom's caller inquired with a half smile.

"Both. Or, to be more explicit and direct in my reply, and in order to explain in a single word what I mean—yes."

"The one word, Mr. Clancy, implies that you believe Keese and Chilton to be identical"; and Van Cleve gave voice to a meaningless remark which is usually spelled "Humph!" only the orthography never properly expresses it.

"I do," Tom replied quietly.

"Why?"

"I'm damned if I can tell you why—and that's flat. But I do, just the same. And the conviction, for it amounts to that, puts me into the very deuce of a pickle all around."

"Cannot you give me some sort of a reason for your conviction?"

"No more than you can give me one for yours; and I am quite certain that your belief is approximately the same as mine, sir."

"No, Clancy, it is not. But I will say this: If I were situated as you are, in relation to this whole affair, I have not a doubt that I would think exactly as you do."

"What do you mean by that?"

"This: You have seen and talked with Chilton only two or three times. I have seen him and talked with him, and hobnobbed with him hundreds of times."

"I have been in his company for days at a time. We have traveled together across leagues of territory in the saddle, side by side. I have known him when serious danger threatened, and have always found him to be cool, resourceful, self-reliant, and brave, and have been enabled to observe him very closely in such extremities.

"I have seen him and observed him at Mexican *fiestas*, when there was dancing and music and laughter all around us. I have seen him in my office, engaged in business affairs, and in his own rooms when he was host and I was guest.

"And always I have studied him more closely than I would have done with another man—because—there was always an indefinable something about the man that impressed me with a vague uneasiness.

"And now—and this is the point—I cannot discover one single characteristic, mannerism, gesture, or feature of Benton Keese's which was also Chilton's.

"*And I do not believe that it is within the scope and power of any man to disguise himself so thoroughly.*"

"Once upon a time I learned to speak Spanish fluently, Mr. Van Cleve," Tom said.

"Yes? What has that got to do with it?"

"I remember a Spanish proverb that I learned. It has a lot of meaning, too; and it seems to apply just here."

"What was it?"

"Translated to English, and rather liberally, it means: 'When you study the motives of a friend or an enemy, give him the benefit of the doubt, both ways.'"

Van Cleve smiled broadly. "I quoted the same proverb to Bingham Harvard this evening," he said.

"Were you discussing Keese?"

"Yes."

"Then you were of the opinion that Keese might be Chilton? And Bing had the same idea, did he?"

"I won't go so far as to say that. But the suggestion was made by one of us—that it is within possibility that it might be so."

"Which one made it?"

"Harvard, I think. But you have not told me why you quoted that old proverb."

"I mentioned it because, in studying this question, I have attempted to follow out the rule of that proverb. I have undertaken to give the man the benefit of the doubt—*both ways.*"

"I am still in the dark, Mr. Clancy."

"Do you play chess, Mr. Van Cleve? Yes? Then you know how a good chess player studies his game a great many moves ahead; how he arranges several plans, and seeks to anticipate what the moves of his opponent would be, for each plan; and how he finally selects what he believes to be the best plan, and follows it out tenaciously—unless an entirely unexpected move by his opponent *forces* him to change it?"

"It seems to me that we are getting farther and farther away from the significance of the Spanish proverb."

"No. We are getting closer to it."

"How so?"

"If I give Chilton the benefit of the doubt, both ways—studying him from the time that he entered your employ, and assuming that he *is now* Benton Keese; but observing him for the time being only as Chilton—I am brought to the conclusion that the man has observed you and your methods and your business affairs closely before he applied to you for employment."

"Well?"

"The various ramifications of your ventures in Mexico was the chess board. Your mines, your contracts, your investments, your fortune, or a great part of it, and the work you were doing, were the pawns in the game.

"You were the king he was to checkmate, and you lost your queen irretrievably when you made him your general manager and put him in charge of your affairs.

"He took away your rooks, your bishops and your knights when your attention was diverted by the unsettled conditions by which you were surrounded. He would have driven you into a corner and checkmated you if you had not made that sudden and totally unexpected move of throwing everything down there to the dogs and returning to New York.

"I verily believe, Mr. Van Cleve, if it had not been for that you would be dead by now, and that Harvard and I would be entertaining Chilton here in your name."

Van Cleve nodded as if he thought so, too.

"But," Tom continued, "you did make that unexpected move, and at exactly the right time. Even so, he has driven you into a corner where you can only move to and fro on a couple of squares while you watch and wait for him, through his overconfidence, to make a false move."

"I entirely understand the simile you draw, Clancy. And, so far as the man Chilton is concerned, I am ready to accept it. In fact, I have done so already.

"But you have said not a thing, as yet, to convince me that Chilton is Keese, or that a man *can* change his spots (I mean his personality, of course) as effectively and completely as Keese has done, *if he was* Chilton."

"You forget entirely the one important thing, Mr. Van Cleve."

"Do I? What is it?"

"Benton Keese is *not* disguised. *Benton Keese* has not changed a spot."

"Eh? I do not—"

"Holbrook Chilton *was* in disguise, from the very first time you ever saw him, until the very last time."

"You mean by that—just what, Mr. Clancy?"

"I mean that every move that Chilton made in the game he was playing with you for an opponent had been previously thought out. That every gesture he employed, every mannerism he used, every figure of speech he adopted, every peculiarity he seemed to possess, was assumed for your benefit.

"I mean that he was always fully informed of your coming before you arrived, and was prepared for it; that he was surrounded by men who would not notice any change in his attitude or demeanor between the occasions when you were present and when you were not—or, if they did so, would attribute such a change to the presence of the 'boss.'

"I mean that in all the times when you were together in Mexico Chilton was playing—and doing it thoroughly—a part that he had carefully studied in each and every detail, and that the Chilton *you* knew was no more the *real man* than *Shylock* was when Henry Irving played that character.

"And, lastly, I mean this: that Benton Keese is merely his natural self; that in him you see only the great actor in private life; and, as in the case of all great actors, he does not at all resemble any one of the characters he assumes in his play-acting."

"That would presuppose that Holbrook Chilton came into my employ with the deliberate intention of robbing me finally."

"Exactly. And of murdering you, too, doubtless, and so obtaining *all* you possessed. But you made an unexpected move toward the end of the game, and so, let us say, saved a fairly good chunk of your bacon."

"But Clancy, it would also presuppose that the man knew a great deal about my personal affairs. That I am practically alone in the world; that if I should disappear, and he was to assume my name and place—and fortune—there would be practically nobody to question his claim; nobody but Sterling Chester."

"Yes; and in reply to that we have the fact that Chilton somehow knew

that Chester was traveling in Egypt, when *you* did not know it."

"The whole thing amazes me, Mr. Clancy. I confess it. And your arguments do impress me. I must admit that, too. But, if your assumption is correct, how are we to establish the truth of it?"

"That remains to be seen. Let me ask you this: Have you noticed that you have been followed and spied upon recently?"

"No."

"I have. So has Rushton. So will you, if you watch out. I'll bet you a hat that you were followed to this house to-night, and will be followed back to your hotel when you go out.

"What for, and by whom, and all the rest of it, you wish to ask? For the ultimate security of Benton Keese, and by operatives from the Roland Detective Agency (so Rushton informed me), which I suspect is employed by Keese.

"And the 'all the rest of it' is easy enough to guess. Mr. Benton Keese, *alias* Holbrook Chilton, wishes to anticipate any and all moves that may be made against him."

CHAPTER XXV.

The Other Side of Benton Keese.

AS for Benton Keese, our good friend Rodney Rushton followed after him. When that person parted with Clancy at Fifth Avenue and Fifty-Ninth Street he went directly to his hotel, which, as it happened, was the same at which Van Cleve was staying, the Mammoth; and he went at once to his rooms, where he waited with considerable impatience the anticipated arrival of a certain Mr. Dudley Roland, who, nevertheless, did not make his appearance until after one o'clock.

But when he did appear Rushton, who was waiting and watching, saw him and knew well his business and where he was going.

Keese motioned the man to a chair and glanced rapidly and impatiently through the written reports contained on several sheets of paper which Roland gave to him. But he crushed them in his hands and tossed them into an open grate, where he touched a match to them before he had half scanned their contents.

"I want no written reports of what you do for me," he said sharply. "You might be hit by an automobile or drop dead when you are bringing them to me. And I don't care a damn what Operative No. 1, or 2, or anybody else does. I want results.

"So suppose you tell me as concisely as possible just what those reports contained. I did not read them all."

"Van Cleve, Clancy, Redhead and two of his operatives, Mrs. Harvard, and ex-Lieutenant Rushton were all at Harvard's bank late this afternoon, in private conference in the directors' room. I don't know anything about the subject of the conference."

"The subject does not matter. Go on."

"Rushton and Van Cleve left the bank together. They came to this hotel and spent more than an hour together in Van Cleve's rooms.

"Rushton left here shortly after five o'clock. He went to his own home, remained inside the house only a few minutes, came out with a small grip in his hand, went to the Pennsylvania station, bought a ticket for St. Louis and went away. My operative left on the same train."

Keese lifted one hand to enjoin silence, and spent a moment in deep thought. Then:

"Go on," he said.

"Clancy came out of the bank with Mrs. Harvard, dismissed his own car and rode home with her—but you know that, because you reached there at the same time they did with a lady."

"I thought I told you that your operatives were not to know *me* at all," Keese said sharply.

"They do not, sir. I happened to be on that part of the job myself."

"Well?"

"Harvard remained at the bank until nearly six. Then he went home. Van Cleve dined here at the hotel, smoked, and read the paper at the table afterward, and then walked all the way to Harvard's house. You came out of the house with Clancy—"

"Never mind what *I* did. I am reasonably well informed as to that."

"When you parted with Clancy at Fifty-Ninth Street he went home. Half an hour later a messenger boy appeared at the house and came away shortly afterward with a letter in his hand. He brought it to this hotel.

"My operative used a near-by telephone a few minutes later and inquired of the desk-clerk if a messenger had lately left a letter for Mr. Van Cleve and if Mr. Van Cleve had yet received it. The message from Clancy was for him of course.

"Van Cleve arrived at the hotel a little after eleven. He read the letter from Clancy and went outside at once, called a taxi and was driven to Clancy's house. He stayed there an hour. He is now in his rooms on the tenth floor of this hotel."

"What about the man you call Redhead and his two assistants, who attended the meeting at the bank?"

"One of the operatives trailed Rushton and Van Cleve when they left the bank together. To make it short, that fellow stuck to Rushton and finally left New York on the same train with him. He kept in the background, and I do not know whether Rushton is aware of the man's nearness or not.

"The presumption is that he *does* know it, and that the two are traveling together without having the appearance of doing so."

Keese shook his head with emphasis.

"I don't agree with you," he said. "But that doesn't matter. Where did the remaining two go?"

"To Redhead's office. I had them dropped there."

"Will your man who followed Rushton stick to him?"

"Surest thing you know, Mr. Keese."

"Is he a good man? Can he do the job without being caught at it, even by so clever a fellow as Rushton?"

"He is the very best ever. If he can't do it, nobody can. He will hang to the trail if Rushton leads him around the world."

"Do you know anything about the other fellow? The Redhead operative who is on the same train?"

"I know *all* about him."

"Who and what is he?"

"He used to be a headquarters detective. He was retired a few years ago and went with Redhead. His name is Banta.

"I'll say this for him: they don't make any better detectives for the regular force than he was. He used to be a side partner with Rushton down there, and that is what makes me think that the two are really together.

"Rushton may not have known that Redhead was sending Banta away with him when he started, but you can bet your last dollar that he knows it by this time. I'll receive a wire from Lazarus as soon as they get to St. Louis."

"I think that will do for to-night," Keese said. "Make an extra effort to know everything about Clancy and Van Cleve from now on.

"Never mind Harvard for the present. He is not likely to need watching on my account until Rushton gets back. To-morrow, by noon, I want a complete and thorough report from that new maid of Mrs. Harvard's. You said that she was one of your people. Was that true?"

"Yes. I'll prove it to-morrow noon," Roland replied, and bowed himself out.

CHAPTER XXVI.

When It Was Betty's Move.

"IT is your move to-day, Betty."

The Kentucky girl lifted her glance quickly to her brother's eyes and

regarded him with a steady gaze. But she made no reply in words, and Keese went on in his quietest tone, which had something of the suggestiveness in it of the purring of a tiger-cat, and with a faint smile showing about the corners of his attractive mouth:

"Don't forget about that fifty thousand dollars I have promised you—and don't forget that you have no choice about earning it, either. You've *got* to earn it, Betty; or, if you do not, I promise you that you will wish you had."

"Are you threatening me, Ben?" she asked her brother quietly, and with a brief flash in her eyes, to which he gave no heed even if he noticed it.

"Yes," he replied calmly, as if it were the most natural thing in the world to suggest threats of dire consequences to his own sister. "I am warning you, if you prefer that expression."

She shrugged her shapely shoulders and turned her head to look across the field, all dotted as it was with riders in hunting costumes, with men and women afoot and in the saddle, with gaily colored groups gathered here and there, with prancing or plunging mounts that were all eagerness to be off in the chase.

A throng of automobiles, carriages, vehicles of all descriptions, saddled cobs and spectators on foot, was drawn up beyond the barrier awaiting the signal of the M. F. H. The day was perfect and the Meet was always an event.

Betty and her brother had drawn a little apart from their immediate neighbors—or, to be more explicit, he had signaled her to ride aside with him. Katherine Harvard was surrounded by a group of friends, of whom Tom Clancy was one, close at hand.

Hounds were baying, horses were neighing, men were calling greetings or comments across slight spaces to other men. The time for the start was near.

Miss Keese made no reply to that last remark. Her brother waited an instant for her to do so. Then he said:

"Walk your hunter a little way beside me. I want to make a few suggestions to you, and I do not care to be interrupted. Come."

She obeyed him. And in another moment he utterly amazed her by the question he asked, which was not at all what she had expected.

"How much in earnest are you in this affair with Tom Clancy?"

Betty's face flushed to a crimson instantly. Her eyes flashed ominously as she turned toward him and replied with almost childlike petulance:

"That is none of your business, Ben Keese."

"Granted, and without a murmur, my dear sister—unless you force me to make it my business," he replied with a smile that was not pleasant, since, being his sister and knowing him as she did, she understood the menace of it.

"How much of that music-talk that you played to him last Monday evening did you mean, Betty?"

"That is none of your business, either."

"Which, for you, is another manner of saying that you meant all of it," he said, and the half derisive smile on his face grew wider. "Oh, I was listening, and watching, too, sister. I heard it all and I saw it all. A deaf man and a blind man might have done the same, I think.

"Well, Clancy has got plenty of coin and he comes of a good family, so I haven't the slightest objection to your—"

"As if it would make any difference if you had!" she interrupted him hotly.

"Oh, it would make a difference; a very great one, my dear sister. I could spoil your little romance in a jiffy, if I wanted to; and I *may* want to. That all depends upon you. Do you understand that?"

She shuddered in spite of herself; not because she believed what he said,

but because all of her life she had feared this brother of hers and his subtle and unholy ways with people who offended him.

He saw and understood that shudder, and laughed quietly.

"Do you understand that?" he repeated.

"I know what you intend to imply by the words you use," she answered.

"Then that is sufficient. You have a good mount under you, Betty, and there is neither man nor woman here to-day who is your superior in the hunting field. I know that, and you know it, too."

"Well?"

"I am not going to impose a difficult task upon you."

"What is the task that you *would* impose—if I should consent to it?" she demanded, still with some heat; and there was nothing in her manner to indicate that she had any idea of consenting to anything that he might ask.

"You have only to hold up a finger, Betty, and Clancy will nod his head. He will sit up and speak, lie down and roll over, play dead, or eat out of your hand at your slightest command."

Keese bent a trifle nearer to her and added: "I want you to lead him a chase that he won't soon forget to-day; and I don't care *where* it takes you, if only it is far enough away from Katherine. Do you understand that, also?"

Betty made no reply.

Her brother pulled in his horse and turned about so that he faced in the direction from which they had come. She was obliged, perforce, to do the same.

Keese nodded his head toward the group they had just left and they could see that Katherine and Clancy had drawn a little apart from the others and appeared to be engaged in earnest conversation together.

Benton Keese indulged in one of his inscrutable smiles.

"I know exactly what Kitten is saying to Clancy," he told his sister. "I know it as well as if I could hear the words. She is telling him that she wants him to keep as close to her as possible during the hunt; she is asking him to ride beside her, from start to finish, if he can—even if he is compelled to desert you to do so; and she is agreeing to square him with you later.

"*And* he is promising. How is that for reading lip movement when I am so far away that I cannot even see their lips?" he asked, and chuckled.

Betty was still silent.

"What is the matter? Have you lost your tongue?" he demanded sharply.

"No; nor my ears, either."

"That is fortunate, at least. Are you going to do as I asked?"

"No."

"What's that?"

"You heard me, I think."

"Do I understand, Elizabeth, that you refuse to do what I have asked?"

She nodded without speaking.

"Is this mutiny, my dear? Are you defying me?" he asked with his slow smile.

"Ben Keese, I am not going to do one single thing that will give you an opportunity to make love to Kitty. Not one. I am not going to do a thing that will give you a chance to be alone with her for one minute, if I can help it—and I think I can.

"You can take your old fifty thousand dollars and go hang with it, for all I care. I would not *touch* it, even if I were starving and did not have a home to go to. So, *there!*"

She brought her hunting crop down sharply upon the flank of her horse simultaneously with that last exclamation and shot away from his side before he could reply to her; and he only shrugged his shoulders and smiled while he jogged slowly after her.

The eyes of many women sought and followed Benton Keese that day.

He was undeniably handsome, eminently graceful, and he was at his best in the saddle—a circumstance of which

he was quite conscious, although he was wise enough not to show it.

There were few women whom he did not affect in much the same way that Lady Kate felt, and resented, propinquity with him. They were inclined to seek his eyes and to flush and withdraw their own instantly.

He seemed to possess the occult power to strip them of their moral armor with a glance; to compel within them, unknowingly but inevitably, a quickening of the heart-beats and to bring to the surface the unwelcome blush of elemental consciousness.

Always they lowered their eyes or turned them away from his bold gaze with a sense of startled modesty and an uncomfortably rapid pulse—and just as certainly would they seek his glances again, stealthily, covertly, and often without the power to resist the mysterious attraction he exerted upon them.

With the hunt itself and with the gay throng of people who were assembled there at the great event of the year with the Forestbrook Club, we have nothing to do; only with the events which shaped themselves because of that occasion.

Betty Keese had spent much time in thought after the occurrences of the preceding Monday, when her brother had taken her to ride in his new car solely for the purpose (as she was well aware) of compelling her to his will in the matter of aiding his mad scheme for the undoing of Katherine Harvard.

His proposal to give her a large sum of money had shocked her; not because he had offered to pay it to her for a service she was to perform for him and which he demanded in return for it—for Betty knew her brother, and that was like him.

But she was shocked because he possessed that much to give, knowing that it could represent but a small part of what he had in store, else he would not have offered it.

And she had not doubted his earnestness.

What she did doubt—and she had no reason for doubting other than her intimate understanding of this man who was her own brother—was that he could have become possessed of so much money honestly.

Betty understood Benton's principles thoroughly; or, rather, his lack of them. She knew him to be entirely unmoral, and that he was thoroughly an egotist, a self-worshiper, a person without a conscience as she understood the meaning of the word.

Not for one moment during her conversation with him that Monday afternoon had she wavered in her loyalty to Katherine, although she had permitted him to think that she appeared to do so reluctantly.

Nor did she believe that his passion for her friend Kitty was what she would have called the real thing. Katherine Harvard was merely something that he wanted and that had been withheld. That was all, according to Betty's understanding.

But what she did know, and what she did fear with all her heart and soul, and what she was determined to prevent, no matter what the consequences, was that he would get Katherine by fair means or by foul ones, if the slightest opportunity presented itself or could be forced.

She also knew that Benton Keese would not stop at the commission of any brutality that might seem to him necessary or vital to his selfish interests and designs.

Then, during the evening that followed, had happened the episode of the photograph and her impulsive exclamation at the first sight of it.

Betty believed in " first impressions " —first impulses. Likewise there had remained with her always certain memories of her childhood, when she was a little girl and her brother was a big boy, which the flashing of that picture upon her consciousness had very prominently brought to mind.

In a word, Betty was just as shrewd and subtle in her own sweet

and pure way as her Brother Benton, and there had remained not the least doubt in her secret thoughts (although she had spoken differently at the time) that the picture really was a photograph of Benton, even though he preferred to deny it.

And she had sensed, too, the undercurrent of interest that had affected the others who were present at the time, although she had not understood it at all.

She had asked herself mentally many times since last Monday evening why her brother had denied the picture and his own connection with it, and who and what Benton could have been and done in the character of Holbrook Chilton; and always with the thought of it the memory of his fifty thousand dollars offer to her returned.

Angered and incensed as she was at the moment she turned from Benton and rode galloping away from him, stirred to the depths also by her unswerving loyalty to Katherine, and roused to a pitch of entire defiance of her brother's schemes against her friend by her intuitive perception of the horror of them, the scene in the library of Harvard's home last Monday night nevertheless came back to her forcefully before her mount had covered half the distance that separated her from her friends.

As in a flash, Betty saw, or believed that she did so, and clearly, Benton's apparent reason for denying the photograph. Instantly she understood that in some manner it was associated with his possession of so much money—and she read, in the memory of that scene, the fact that there had been during it an undercurrent of excited interest in the absent character of Chilton which every person in the room, save herself, had felt.

Suddenly, then, while she was still at some distance from Tom and Kitty, who were drawn apart and evidently awaiting her, she wheeled her horse sharply around and faced her brother again. And he, mistaking her attitude for one of surrender, pulled in his mount and rode leisurely up to her; nor did he make any effort to conceal the half smile of triumph that glowed in his eyes as he approached.

Betty sat very still in the saddle, waiting; and when he was quite close to her and had come to a stop she said coldly:

"Benton, I don't know why you denied that you were the Holbrook Chilton of that photograph last Monday night. But you did deny it, and you made everybody but me believe in your denial.

"You even thought that you made me believe it, too—but you didn't. And I could read something between the lines of that scene that was not at all to Mr. Holbrook Chilton's credit; something that is known to Mr. Van Cleve, to Mr. Harvard, to Tom Clancy, and even to Katherine; something that only I, of all who were present, did *not* know.

"But I propose to find out exactly what it is all about, Ben Keese, and if you persist in persecuting Kitty I won't spare you when I do find out, even though you *are* my brother.

"You have dared to threaten me, so now I give you back threat for threat."

She touched her horse with the crop, but her brother bent forward and grasped her bridle-rein.

For a moment after that he glared into her defiant eyes menacingly, while a slow and cruel smile bared his white and even teeth. Then, with careful emphasis, he said, and in a tone that made her shudder in spite of herself:

"You will regret this attitude bitterly, Elizabeth; and, believe me, you have only succeeded in hastening the destruction of your friend—and your own undoing, too."

Then he released her bridle-rein and rode swiftly past her toward the waiting group of hunters.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK. Don't forget this magazine is issued weekly, and that you will get the continuation of this story without waiting a month.

ALL FOR HIS COUNTRY*

A SERIAL IN IV PARTS—PART IV

BY J. U. GIESY

Author of "The Blue Bomb," and Co-author with J. B. Smith of the Semi Dual Stories

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS

MEADE STILLMAN, of Utah, comes to Washington with the model of a new aero-destroyer that will give the United States undisputed prestige in warfare. Colonel Gethelds, an old friend of Meade's father, and head of the Strategy Board of the nation, favors the adoption of the invention, but Congressman Gotz opposes it, as his business is selling aeroplanes to the government. Other means failing, he digs up an old scandal about Meade's father to defeat the project before the board. Meade goes home, after assuring Gethelds's daughter Bernice, to whom he has taken a fancy, that he will return if his country ever needs him. Later, Mexico declares war on the United States.

While the Mexican Federals are engaging the United States troops in battle along the Rio Grande, Japan lands a hostile force in San Francisco and captures the city. Meanwhile, a Japanese fleet, steaming toward New York City, annihilates the Atlantic Squadron sent out against it. Bernice Gethelds is in New York visiting her aunt when the fleet from Nippon approaches that city.

New York is reduced to ruins by the Japanese, who blockade the harbor and fire their deadly bombs into the metropolis. Harold Darling, an old friend of the Gethelds family, who is in love with Bernice, manages to rescue her from the devastated city by flying there in his biplane and bringing her back to Washington with him. Bernice's aunt has been killed by a falling wall during the bombardment. The President and Cabinet decide, after the Japanese offer peace only on the most unreasonable terms, to lay waste the Atlantic seaboard, make Chicago the capital of the nation, and fight the invaders with guerrilla warfare. This plan is carried into effect. Bernice Gethelds, who has received a letter from Meade Stillman, postmarked "Hite, Utah," suggests to President Gilson, in Chicago, that Darling accompany her to the home of the young inventor to persuade him to save the country with his destroyer. The President approves of the idea and orders Bernice and Darling carried in a special train to White House, Utah. From there they fly to Hite in a large biplane brought with them on the train and assembled at White House, and a number of miles into the desert beyond, to a dwelling which Bernice believes, from Meade's own description, is the Stillman home.

CHAPTER XVI.

Meade's Confession.

AN oblong of light showed the opening of a door in the mass of the house set under the trees. The figure of a man appeared, peering into the darkness.

"Who called?" challenged a voice.

"I did," replied Darling. "Lend us a light or a lantern, will you? We've tumbled into your yard." He chuckled.

"Wait a moment," said the man and vanished. Yet in the few seconds he had stood there, with a beam of the lighted interior striking his face, Bernice had recognized Stillman.

Her heart began beating quickly, with the certain knowledge that they had reached the place they sought. "Did you recognize him? It was Meade," she whispered to Darling.

*** This story began in The Cavalier for February 21.**

Harold nodded. "Right you are, Biddy. This is your number. Suppose we alight." He climbed from his seat and assisted her to the ground.

The figure of Stillman reappeared, swinging a lantern, and came directly toward them. Bernice waited until he was almost upon them and spoke: "Good evening, Mr. Stillman."

She heard the catch of his breath.

The next instant he had raised the lantern and held it to light her face. She had slipped off her goggles since landing, and the yellow glow brought her features out in striking distinctness against the background of the night. "Miss Gethelds!" gasped Meade, and paused, overcome by sheer surprise.

"And Mr. Darling, whom you will remember," said Bernice, extending a gauntleted hand. "Aren't you going to say you're glad to see us? I'm not used to having my gentlemen friends stand aghast at my presence."

"But how — what brought you — here?" stammered Stillman, letting the lantern sink and taking the proffered hand.

Darling chuckled again.

"The aeroplane brought her, old chap," he remarked, coming to the astonished Meade's assistance. "It pretty well near succeeded in breaking her neck, too. I came down like the side of a house. I'm a bit awkward in my handling in these altitudes."

"You might have killed her, trying to land here in the dark," said Meade in quick reproach.

"Not my fault I didn't," admitted Darling. "Always was a fool for luck, though. It still holds. You see, we were in a hurry and I didn't think it would be light for some hours, and I was tired of flying. Besides, we were hunting you."

"Hunting me?" Stillman's surprise began to mount once more.

"Correct. Quit chinning and take Miss Gethelds inside. We've had a bit of a flight to-day as it happens. Leave me the lantern, like a good chap. I want to look around and see what your piece of earth did to my machine. We've got to get out to-morrow."

"To-morrow?" Meade was becoming monosyllabic.

"Right. Give me the lantern." He took it from Stillman's hand. "Take him inside, Biddy," he admonished.

Bernice laughed softly and laid her hand on Meade's arm. "Please take me in and let me sit down," she requested. "We really have flown all day to find you, and we are in a great hurry."

"Your pardon," said Stillman. "I was overcome—with surprise."

He turned and led her toward the house, whose door remained open. Walking beside him, she felt the sinewy strength of his arm which supported her hand. And this was Meade Stillman's home, she thought, as she neared the open door. Some way she found herself breathing more quickly. It was in this place the miracle had been given birth.

Meade stood aside for her to enter the lighted room.

She passed and found herself within an immense apartment, its floors covered with brilliant Navajo blankets, its walls faced with jointed lumber and trimmed with game-heads and other blankets. Beside a large, strongly constructed table a man had risen and was facing her entrance. Instinctively she knew him for Meade's father, and advanced with a smile.

"I am sure you are Professor Stillman," she said, before Meade could voice an introduction. "Mr. Stillman told me so much of you when he was in Washington."

Howard Stillman smiled and clasped her hand. "And you are Miss Bernice Gethelds, daughter of my old friend," he responded. "I heard Meade cry out your name. I am happy to welcome you to my poor house. I have sent my servants to prepare a room for your immediate use. Let me offer you a chair. You have a bag or other luggage?"

"A tooth-brush and a tube of paste in my pocket," laughed Bernice. "We came merely to call. Oh!" The last was an involuntary exclamation quickly checked, as a Navajo squaw appeared at a door behind Stillman and addressed him in guttural accents.

Stillman smiled. "Your room is ready, Miss Bernice," he told her. "Spring Water, here, will show you to it till you freshen up a bit."

Bernice smiled at the brown and wrinkled face of the waiting woman and followed her as she led her to a room opening off the main living apartment she had first entered.

Spring Water waved a comprehensive hand about the chamber.

"Water, soap, towel," she grunted, indicating the articles she mentioned on a small rustic sort of stand. "Wash um, brush um hair, feel better. *Bueno.*" She turned and waddled, rather than walked, from the room, with the flat-footed glide of moccasined feet.

Bernice slipped out of her close-fitting cap and shook her head to free the close-pressed hair on her scalp. She glanced about the room, and a smile flicked on her lips. This was Meade's room. Her color mounted. She lifted her hands and loosened her hair, brushing it quickly, laved her face and hands in the water from the pitcher, and arranged the ruddy masses upon her head.

Feeling decidedly refreshed, she turned back to the other room.

Meade alone stood by the door, leaning against its frame, looking out. He turned at the sound of her entrance and smiled. "Father is out with Darling at your machine," he told her. "Darling says he strained something in landing. I hope you'll overlook my first surprise at your coming. I was completely floored for a minute or two, and you know what a babe in arms I am at knowing how to act."

"Don't you think you overestimate your own failings?" asked the girl as she crossed to his side. "The only time I ever saw you handle a gripping situation, you know you impressed me as knowing just *about* how to act."

Meade flushed.

"You mean that night I defied Gotz?" he said quickly. "After all, that was just primitive man speaking—it came natural to resent his remarks about some one I loved and respected."

"It is the natural things which *are* genuine," said Bernice.

Meade nodded. "Yet you have to polish a diamond to make it shine," he smiled. "I think I was a bit frightened as well as surprised to-night when you spoke to me. You see, you ran an awful risk in landing by chance, like that."

"It was justified by the need," she rejoined.

He started and lifted his eyes squarely to hers. "There is some need—something I can do? You come to find me for that? You believe what I wrote you?"

"Yes—I need you very much. You mustn't fail me." Her eyes did not shift from his regard.

Suddenly he laughed softly—in a manner as though a burden had been lifted rather than placed upon him. He came a pace closer and leaned toward her.

"Tell me," he urged quickly. "What is it? Are you in trouble—can I help you?" Eagerness rang in his tones and woke an echo of gladness in her breast. Here, she told herself, was yet another man who stood ready to throw himself into the breach without asking for a selfish reward or selfish consideration; a man who would act in a natural way, fight in a natural way, love—she caught herself with a little inward shock and shook herself back to reply to his question:

"I wonder if Darling and your father can't come in? I must talk to both your father and yourself, and time presses. Won't you call them in?"

He shot her a puzzled glance, but asked no reason for her request. Swinging to the door, he disappeared

into the night. Soon steps sounded outside, and the three men entered.

Still standing, she waited until they were inside and seated herself at the table, maintaining silence until they had found other seats for themselves. She was marshaling her words, her arguments, before speaking. "I came because of the war," she said at last.

"War! What war?" cried Meade, half starting from his chair. The eyes of his father widened and narrowed as quickly, though he did not speak. Harold nodded as he recognized the advantage of her opening.

She had chosen a word to thrill and fire the breast of the male.

She answered in hurried description. While they sat leaning to her, drinking in her words with shocked and startled ears, she told them of what had occurred within the last few months, drew them the picture of the nation driven against the wall of last resistance, described, as one who had seen it, the fall and destruction of New York.

"And that is what brings me to you," she made an ending. "I knew of this airship of yours and what it was said it could do. I knew that you had promised me in your letter that if ever the country needed your help it should have it, and that you said all I had to do was to ask for your assistance at any time.

"And so I came to ask you to help your country; to come back with this invention of yours and save her from her danger. And I came because—I knew that if I asked it, you would know that the need was great, and because I felt that I knew you well enough to know what your answer would be. Meade Stillman, I bring you the call of your country!"

She paused, breathing quickly, and sat leaning toward him, her breast pressed against the table, her hands flung out, gripping the edge—waiting the effect of her words.

Meade Stillman rose slowly from his chair. A deep drawn breath swelled his chest and held it so for a moment. He turned in silence from the lure of the beautiful woman before him and let his eyes fall on the figure of the elder man, and found his eyes fixed on him. "Father?" he said.

"The call is to you, my boy," said Howard Stillman.

Meade's head came up with a jerk. He swung back to the girl at the table. "Then I shall answer it!" he cried. "Miss Gethelds, I am coming back. I know what the Stillman ship will do. That night when I left your home and started back here I stopped and looked out over the city. There was a great white shaft pointing up to the sky, and it was all silver in the moonlight.

"I stood and I looked a long time at it, and some way it seemed even then that some time — somehow — I, too, should have a chance to show that I loved my country. And so—and so—"

He paused and fought with an overwhelming emotion. Then, while they watched in silence, he turned and walked into the night, in search of a lost self-control.

"God help the Japs when they meet that spirit," said Darling in the surcharged moment which followed.

"War," said Prof. Stillman. "War, and we never knew it. That's what it means to be buried alive, young people. We haven't been out of the desert since June. We have heard nothing. We neither knew nor dreamed. I marvel that you found us."

"Men tried and failed—a woman succeeded," said Darling.

Stillman nodded.

"A woman," he repeated. "They are really the ones who inspire all action, Darling. The Stillman machine may accomplish the result in a material way, but after all it will still be the woman who will save the nation. They are the ones who dare all, as this little girl has dared all, in a cause.

"It is they who know how to forget the self; they who know how to give and not falter. I have sometimes

thought it is they who preserve our faith in ourselves. My dear, you are a rare vision in this place. It is long since I have seen a woman of my own kind, save in dreams. How is your father? He was one of my old-time friends."

"Well, but awfully busy," said Bernice.

The professor began a series of questions, which she answered. He seemed to feel a thirst for first-hand news of the world in which he had once held a part. Darling helped out in drawing him a picture of the present situation.

An hour passed, and he frowned. "I wonder where that boy is keeping himself?" he broke out. "I never saw him affected like this. After all he is not a man, save in years and education. I have not done by him as I ought, I suppose, in keeping him by me. I think perhaps I had better see if I can find him."

Bernice rose. A sudden impulse had seized her. "Let me," she suggested. "I believe I understand his feelings. It was the suddenness overcame him." She moved toward the door. "I'll bring him back," she promised, and passed out.

Outside she paused and closed her eyes to rid them of the blurring transition from the lighted room. She felt a tremor shake her. Now that she had followed the impulse which had caused her action, and found herself surprised that there should have been an impulse.

Yet she had studied the face of the man who had gone this way the hour before, and she had seen the chrysalis of youth and inexperience burst before her eyes, and the soul of the man to be look forth. For one instant, even then, an urge to follow him into the night had surged within her. It was the maternal instinct to still the suffering pangs of labor, either of body or soul—the age-old instinct of the mother which lurks in every female breast.

She stood for a moment, shaken by the inexplicable quiver which set her knees to shaking.

Then she passed forward, and from under the trees about the house. A faint, new crescent moon had come up and hung above the rim of the oasis, its sickle blade giving a faint, glistening light, which made her able to see where she went with care. November though it was, the oasis lay scarcely touched by the finger of winter, and the night air was comparatively soft.

In her leathern jacket, she felt no sense of cold as she moved on past the aeroplane and went down a sloping surface from the house. She was recalling lines of the letter Meade had mailed to her from Hite:

> To the west of the house lie the pastures, green with lush growing lucerne, and sometimes, when the longing and the loneliness crowd too close upon me, I rise and go down and stand in the midst of the sleeping vegetation, and stretch out my arms to the east. And I lift up my face to the moon, if there be one, and try to picture it shining on a wonderful crown of wonderful hair, and lighting a woman's face.

He had spoken freely in that letter, as a natural man, untrammeled by more modern conventions, might speak; pouring out upon the paper the youth, the longing, the hope and ambitions, and the inexperience of his manhood, so that the woman, younger in years, but older in knowledge, could look far into his soul. And because she remembered those lines, she went toward the west from the house, toward the fields and the crescent moon.

The grasses of the oasis swept her feet and ankles as she passed and went down the little incline.

Somewhere she heard the purl of running water and the twitter of a night bird, and she came to a fence of wire. She stooped and crawled between its strands, rose, and stared before her over the tops of the late crop lucerne which filled the field. So far as she could see, she was alone in the night. She lifted her voice.

"Meade — Meade Stillman!" she called softly and paused to listen.

A figure rose from among the alfalfa and stood at a distance before her.

"Meade," she repeated and started forward, unconscious that she had addressed him by his given name. Again the quiver of unnamed feeling shook her body.

"Miss Gethelds — Bernice," said Stillman and came to meet her. "What is it? Why do you come to me here? Why not father or Darling?"

"I came because I wanted to, and because we wondered what kept you. I thought— Oh, I thought I understood better how you felt. And I remembered what you wrote in the letter —that you came here to think—"

"About you," said the man. "Well —it was true. I was thinking about you again, just now, before you came. Do you see the moon?"

She nodded.

"It is the new moon—the moon of new things — of new endeavors," he continued. "Oh, it is fate! To-day I was the same man I have always been, with no further outlook than the rim rock of this valley. To-night comes—with the new moon—and you.

"Bernice—don't take offense, for I mean none, and you *are* Bernice to me —I know nothing of the art of making love, but the last year has taught me much of love itself; for I have been a lover ever since that night I told you I would come if you ever asked it, and ran away, because I did not dare to say good-by, for fear I might say something else. How I should tell you of this, I do not know.

"I believe there are rules to be observed, but I do not know them. All I know is that I love you; that I want to give you my life; that I want to guard you and shield you and protect you; that I want to work for you, win for you, and bring what I win and lay it at your feet, as the cave man brought home his kill to the cave.

"It is not the love of the cities perhaps, but it is the right love—the natural love—the love of the birds and the beasts — the kind which makes the world what it is—for which we were both created. As the world looks at the thing—as perhaps I shall look at it to-morrow—I should not tell you this till I have cleared my name.

"But at least I know that I am the innocent son of an innocent man, no matter what the world may say. And I know that you trust me. And because you have come to me here in the fields, I know that—you love me. Bernice — sweetheart woman — come to me." He opened his arms to her.

Again the tremor shook her as she stood before him. As he ceased speaking, she lifted her eyes. Her lips parted. Like one moving in a dream, she swayed toward him, reached him, touched him, felt his arms close about her, leaned against him, buried her face on his breast, and ceased to tremble as the strength of his body struck through to her own.

A sudden, swift sense of peace and satisfaction filled her, and was followed by the recollection of the arms of another man which had held her and quivered as she herself had shaken but a moment before.

A great wave of pity surged in her breast, but could not drown the comfort of Meade's arms. She lifted her face and found his bent above it. Her own arms crept about him. "Meade," she whispered. "Oh, Meade, my boy —my own boy." She strained him to her and lifted her lips to his.

He laughed softly, gladly, as he lifted his mouth from hers. "The beginning of all things," he said quickly. "The new moon, our love—the beginning of the end of this invasion of our country. Bernice, when I have won this fight, and the last foot of land is regained, will you be my wife?"

He heard her catch her breath.

"Oh, I was forgetting! Meade— I was forgetting. I am a poor agent. I had forgotten everything else, the

war, the need of haste. Come, dear; we must go back to the house. You must get your things ready, for we must hurry back."

"There is little to get ready," he assured her. "All I have to do is pack a bag and a little box of the radium itself. I shall make the real plates in Chicago. But you are tired and should rest." He drew his arm about her. "Come."

He led her back. Presently they came under the trees about the house and paused beside the door.

"I think I'd best go over to the laboratory and pack the stuff for to-morrow," Meade decided. "You go in and try to get some rest. I'll take dad and we'll get everything ready. And I think I'll tell him about what has come to us, while I'm up there. He'll be glad." He reached out and gathered her into his arms again, drew her face up to his. "So this is good night, little girl."

Darling opened the door.

He had heard their voices and swung wide the portal to admit them. The light streamed out and bathed the man and woman in a revealing radiance. "Thought you'd *both* got lost," began Harold and paused abruptly, his tongue arrested by those mutually surrendered figures. With something like a gasp he shut the door.

"Darling," whispered Bernice. She struggled to free herself, pressing on Meade's breast with her palms. "He saw us, Meade. Oh, I must go in! Some way I must make him understand. You see, he never suspected that I loved you. I didn't myself, until you opened your arms back there and bade me come into them.

"Not until then did I know, really —not till I heard the call. And then I knew—as every woman knows, when the real time comes, dear, and she listens and answers the call of the one man. Good night, dear. Go get everything ready." She turned to the door.

Meade pushed it open and held it for her to enter. He thrust a head in and glanced about the room. "Father?" he questioned in an attempt at naturalness.

Darling, who was seated in a chair, lighting a cigarette, glanced up. "He went to the laboratory, I fancy," he offered and rose.

"Thanks," said Meade and shut the door.

Bernice crossed to the table, turned and leaned against it, gripping its edge with her hands. Her pulses were pounding, and a sense almost of guilt oppressed her in her new found happiness as she let her eyes rest on Darling's figure. Yet she raised them resolutely to his. "You saw?" she questioned.

He nodded. "Yes, I saw. Well?"

"You saw Meade Stillman—kiss me?" She paused again.

"Yes; and I think I saw *you* kiss Meade Stillman. Do you love him, Biddy? Was that why you wanted to come for him yourself?"

"No!" she cried out in passionate denial. "I didn't *know* I loved him, Harold. I didn't. When I started on this trip I never thought of love, or knew if I would ever feel it. Like most girls, I suppose I expected it to come to me some time, but not here. It wasn't until after I left here to find him to-night, and found him down below here, and he spoke to me and opened his arms, that I knew. But I do love him, Harold. I do love him.

"I want him for mine; I want to be his. I know now what you meant when you said I had not been touched, but it has come upon me now. I've stopped being just a girl to-night and begun being a woman, and I love—as a woman loves—now." She released her hold on the table and spread her hands before her like a child beseeching favor. "Oh, Harold, dear Big Brother—don't be angry or hurt with me! Please. Don't look at me like that."

Darling crossed and tossed his cigarette into the maw of a fireplace at one

end of the room, turned, and came back upon her in swift strides.

"Look at you," he said almost fiercely. "Good God! How can I help it? I'd rather look at you than at anything else in the world. You're worth it, little sister. You're beautiful, too, little sister—more beautiful to-night, when I know that I've lost you, than ever before, because, as you say, you have become a woman, and your face wears the look of the eternal woman, the Madonna look, which comes with wakened love."

He reached down and prisoned the appealing hands, forced them together and covered them with his own, raised them and pressed them to his breast, up under his bent throat. "Be angry with you, Little Sister?" he went on more calmly. "Be angry with you because your heart has opened to the sunlight of life? Why, dear God, would you think my love of that sort which could feel anger at any reason for your happiness? Oh, Bernice—Bernice, that isn't my sort of love! Your happiness is what my love asks for—just your happiness, dear.

"Look back into the old days, little woman, and ask your heart if I did not always seek the thing which pleased you. Isn't it so? My love wanted to give you pleasure—see you happy—to make you smile and sing and laugh. Angry? No, no, Little Sister mine."

"But I didn't know I loved him," choked Bernice with downcast head. A sob burst from her lips. "If it wasn't for one thing, I'd hate myself for not having learned to love you," she murmured.

"And that thing is Meade Stillman," said Darling. "He's a good bred'un, Biddy. Get him outside, and he'll be a mighty big man."

"Generous to the last," she whispered. She freed her hands, raised one, and gently stroked his cheek. "Oh, Brother — Big Brother, it's breaking my heart to hurt you!" Turning, she fled to her room, her shoulders shaking with the weeping she repressed.

Darling looked after her as she went. Long after the door had been shut he stood there. At length he lifted his head, his shoulders went back. For the last time he choked down an instinctive rebellion. His lips parted, and he whispered softly: "Oh, Bernice—Bernice!" With a sigh of resignation he threw himself into a chair.

Alone in her room, already lighted by a lamp turned low on a little table, Bernice undressed with shaking fingers and laid herself on the bed.

CHAPTER XVII.

The Miracle Spreads Its Wings.

A GLORIOUS sun was slipping through her window when a knock fell on the door of Meade's room and a voice called: "Daughter."

Bernice opened sleepy eyes and stirred. For a moment it seemed to her rousing senses that she was back home and her father's voice was calling. A guilty sense of having overslept assailed her. "Yes," she called in answer. "In a moment, Dad."

She threw back the covers and woke fully to her surroundings. A warm glow filled her heart and spread through her body as she dressed. She knew now that it was Howard Stillman who had called her "daughter."

She dressed to her coat and cap, threw the former over her arm, and went into the other room. Meade, Stillman, and Darling were awaiting her arrival to sit down to a breakfast which Spring Water and Fawn were placing on the table.

"Good morning. What time is it? Have you been up long?" she greeted the three who waited her coming.

"Hours," said Darling. "We're all ready to start. Meade's got a truck out there he says can fly, and we've loaded the stuff he's taking upon it. As soon as we've fed you, my lady, we'll start."

She felt Meade's eyes upon her, and a warm flood swept her cheeks. To cover that instinctive confusion she gave the signal to begin breakfast.

They spoke little and ate in haste. As soon as the meal was finished she donned her cap and coat, and they went outside. As Darling had said, Meade's home-built flier squatted beside the Curtiss, a box and a suit-case strapped to its lower vanes. "Meade says he knows a shorter route to the White House," explained Harold. "He's going to pilot."

Professor Stillman came with them, and the squaw and her daughter watched with stolid interest as Meade mounted his seat. Darling gave him a send-off, and he rose easily from the little slope before the door.

Harold helped Bernice aboard the Curtiss, and Stillman himself spun his engine. Close on Meade's heels, they shot down the slope, tilted, and rose with a circling swing to follow him into the north. Below them Meade's father waved a hand. Bernice answered the farewell gesture.

Three hours saw them over the last ridge of the mountains, coasting easily down on White House.

Leaving the planes, they started the back trip at once. Throughout it, Meade and Harold devoted most of their time to blue-prints. Darling explained that he had requested Gilson to arrange for immediate work on their return in the note he had sent from the depot by Arkel.

He predicted that they would find a machine plant at their disposal. Two days saw them panting into the Northwestern station and descending to greet the grinning Arkel. Thirty minutes found Bernice laughing and sobbing in the arms of her father, and Stillman and Darling on their way to the apartments of Gilson.

Haste became the keynote of the day.

Meade Stillman absolutely refused to talk terms with Gilson. He alleged that he had come to save his country, and that no other price would be accepted beyond her complete release from the invading nation. He was still the idealist Bernice had called him. He had yet to learn the ways of the outer world.

Gilson, too harassed to dicker, accepted his offer, and it was decided to build three machines at first, because of Stillman's limited supply of the necessary radium. At Darling's suggestion, an entire engineering plant had been prepared and a corps of assistants selected.

The day following Stillman's arrival saw the first step taken toward the miracle's materialization.

At Gethelds's own insistence, Stillman made his quarters in the Colonel's home. He accepted the love of his daughter for Meade with little comment, save for a far-away look in the eyes. He had known it must come some day, and he had known Meade's father and loved him.

But Meade made little use of the room set apart for his convenience. For days at a time he lived and slept at the works.

Bernice, at first elated at the thought of having him near her, gradually became a victim to anxious worry, as each time she saw him for a few brief moments she noticed the steady whitening of his face, the growing lines of firmness about his lips, the loss of their easy curve of mental contentment, the progressive narrowing of his lids in the lines of concentration.

As for Stillman himself, he plunged from the first into a maelstrom of explanation, planning, advising, and supervising, which kept him at a continual fever pitch of active working.

That first day, at a consultation with his associate engineers, it was decided to build the framework of the areo-destroyers of vanadium steel, combining lightness with great strength. It was here that Stillman's real quality first began to show. Knowing, as they did from the process of their selection as his staff assistants,

the sort of man they were to meet, his engineers were surprised at the mass of technical knowledge he brought to his task. Whatever he might be in appearance and manner, this was no innocent dreamer from the woods.

The years of training which his father had given now stood him in good stead with these men of practical affairs. Within his chosen field they found him their equal in all, their superior in several ways. More than that, he manifested a certain ability at organization, which began to bring results almost from the first.

The offices set apart for the engineering staff became the scene of an activity indicative of his driving energy and force. A great part of his enthusiasm and faith in the structure he was to produce reflected from the men who worked under his instruction, and came to pervade their endeavors by day and night.

And by day and night the work went on.

All night the lights glowed in the offices of the works, where men, swift at technical and mechanical precision, took the original blue-prints and drafted the patterns of parts which must be molded for the castings. During the first three days Meade Stillman never left the office. With a green shade over his eyes at night and, later, with a cloth dampened at a faucet bound about his brows by day, he drove, drove, drove the wielders of pencil and ruler and square, while the first principal patterns were worked out and sent down to be made.

On the third night he flung himself down on the floor beneath a table, with his coat for a pillow, and slept.

Twice in that time Bernice came and urged him to come back home with her. Each time he kissed her and sent her away, with her growing worry gnawing at her heart. On the morning of the fourth day he telephoned that he had slept at the works the night before, and would be up to see her that afternoon.

When he came she drew him into her arms and made him lie down upon a couch and took his head into her lap. He laughed into her face from tired eyes.

"I don't want to lie down. I don't want to nap," he protested in a boyish manner. "I brought a motor. I want you to come out and drive me about as you did that first afternoon I knew you. I want to go round and round."

"I should think your head would be going round and round," she told him, smiling softly.

"It is," he admitted. "You must drive me round the other way till it stops. Biddy dear, I want fresh air and — you. Things are started. I shall sleep here to-night, after I leave the works."

Womanlike, she yielded and he had his way.

She took him far out through parks and along the Lake Shore Drive. When they returned he insisted on dinner at a down-town café, drove her home at its end, and went back to the plant. By twelve he came back.

"We pour the first casting to-morrow," he announced in satisfied excitement. At six the next morning he was up, and had left the house before she came down. But he had left a note telling her that he had telephoned to Darling, asking him to bring her out to the works to witness the first pouring.

When they arrived Meade met them in working costume. He wore a soft shirt open at the collar and a pair of trousers belted about his lean hips. He led them into an immense gloomy interior, where great fires had been flaring for hours, melting the metals which were to form the keel beams of the aero-destroyers.

The roar of their reverberations in the mighty cupolas well-nigh drowned their voices.

The forms of the molds lay ready stretched upon the floors beyond the fiery caldrons where the molten metal bubbled and frothed. Meade stationed

them where they might see—on a little raised iron platform—and went down to superintend the actual pouring.

At his signal men, naked save for belted trousers and shoes, their torsos the bodies of hairy giants in that place of gloom and fire, sprang to action. The glowing vents of the cupels opened and sent forth sparkling streams of metal, which fell into buckets swung beneath them from great movable cranes.

A myriad sparks, a myriad glowing blobs of metal, formed the spray of those streams. They leaped into the buckets and filled them. With a clank the cranes swung them into motion.

They swayed away toward the empty mouths of the molds. Their surface smoked with an iridescent vapor from their filming contents. The hand of the woman who watched contracted upon the iron rail of the platform where she stood.

The first bucket swung above the intake of the mold of a mighty beam. High overhead, the chains which held the bucket clanked harshly. The bucket fell swiftly into position. It tipped. Across its lip leaped the glowing mass of its contents.

It struck and sank into the mold made ready to receive it. The smoke of its going rose in a swirling vapor above it. It was the first bucket. The first mold of the miracle was poured.

"At last, at last," breathed Bernice, and turned to Harold. "We have witnessed the miracle's conception," she said.

Thereafter the furnaces flared without cessation, and the forges growled and rumbled. Three days after the first mold was poured the first step was taken in actual building.

The keels of the three great destroyers were laid down inside the rising walls of an immense shed which was to house them. A cordon of troops was thrown about the entire plant, and no one allowed to approach without a pass. In every way precautions were taken to protect the growing means of the country's strength from observation.

They began to grow apace.

Out of the flare of the fires which glowed ruddy above their cradle all night; out of the labor of brain and body; out of the roar and the glare, the constant working and striving; out of the pain and sweat of a mass of toiling men, the miracle was slowly rising to a concrete thing.

With the completion of the preliminary work and the beginning of the casting, Meade gave himself to the work of supervision. Here, there, about the great plant he appeared in his open-throated shirt and belted trousers, advising, ordering, suggesting, even taking his place with the toilers by hand and giving them the benefit of his seemingly tireless strength.

No detail became too trivial for his close attention, none seemed to escape him, as the days ran into weeks and weeks became months. Day or night, none knew when the lithe figure of the inventor would drop down among them with questions which snapped with insistence or questions which straightened a confusion into intelligent purpose and understanding.

In a way it seemed that his own development kept pace with the strange creations he was building. He walked in a different manner, spoke in a different way, acted and thought unlike the man who had come from the desert oasis.

A month passed, two, three.

November had gone, December, and January had come in and fled swiftly. Long before this Meade Stillman had surrendered a large part of the actual supervision of construction to his associates, and transferred his attention to the preparation of the radio-active gravity screens. The original chemists laboratory of the works had been converted into the work-room where he conducted his efforts toward the lifting devices of the monster air-ships,

whose steel hulls were now taking definite shape.

This was the only part of the entire undertaking of which he made any secret.

But the laboratory was as carefully guarded as a mint. Special officers and a company of infantry were always on guard about it. Even the regular assistants which necessity forced upon him approached only after a supervision of their pass-cards and a correct replying to a pass-word changed from day to day.

Of these helpers, whom he gathered about him in the supreme work of his task, the chief was a man by the name of Belden—an old man, with white hair and a smooth-shaven chin, in whose pale blue eyes alone remained any apparent fire. Stoop-shouldered, and slow of speech, Belden was a finished technical engineer, with a thorough knowledge of chemistry and electrical application.

Meade himself had picked him out of some dozen men suggested for the place, and found him all he could desire. In fact, the interest which he manifested in the work was second only to Stillman's own.

Between them they took the precious substance Meade had brought from the oasis and began to fashion it into the screens.

A second bond of sympathy drew them together. On a day when Meade first began work on the actual construction of a screen, Belden had cried out at the knowledge he saw unveiled:

"A wonderful brain—a mind of genius devised this!" he exclaimed, his pale eyes lighting. "Is it your conception, Mr. Stillman?"

"My father's," said Meade. "We worked it out together."

"He still lives then?" began Belden, and paused.

Meade started. "Lives?" he questioned. "Yes. Why do you ask?"

Belden did not reply for a moment. He seemed to be turning something in his mind. "I knew him," he said at length. "He had a shrewd intelligence."

"In a scientific way, yes," Meade responded quickly. "You must have known him a long time ago."

Belden nodded. "Before his trouble came upon him," he said.

"He was innocent," challenged the son sharply.

"I always was assured of that," said Belden. "That was one reason I was glad when you gave me this position."

On impulse Meade whirled and thrust out a hand. Belden took it and pressed it in a feeble clasp. From that time a warmer feeling grew in the younger man's heart for the elder as the days sped by and the first set of screens was finished.

It was on that day that Belden voiced an opinion of the screens themselves. "Do you know," he asked in his slow way, "that I think you've stumbled upon a lost art in these, Meade boy?"

Meade looked his question out of tired eyes. The pace he had set for himself and the others was beginning to tell. Sometimes at night now he crept to Bernice and sought the comfort of her touch upon his forehead as he pillowed his head in her lap and spoke softly of the progress in the task at which he strove.

Belden went on: "You know it has always puzzled the scientific world to explain how the Egyptians and those ancient peoples moved their immense monoliths from their quarries to their place of use. I believe they had some secret such as this. Put a plate of this sort under a modern building and you could pick it up and carry it where you willed.

"They were wise, those men of ancient times. Perhaps— There's a fortune in this discovery aside from the air-ships, Meade. If I were you I'd take a set of formulas and place them in a mighty safe place, and then destroy all our working notes."

Stillman laughed.

"Small good the plates would do any one unless he knew how to wire them," he said in some excitement. "That was my idea at the last. If they aren't wired right, they won't work, and I intend doing the wiring after they're in position. You will help, Belden, of course, but no one else."

"I might steal the idea, too, Meade," Belden chuckled.

"You might," said Stillman; "but I don't believe you'd rob an innocent man of his labors. You're no thug, Belden. You're more like dad himself."

"I was at least," said Belden. A spasm of something like pain twitched his sallow face.

For three months the forges had thundered. For three months, bit by bit, the steel framework of the monsters had been fitted into place. For three months a ceaseless energy, a ceaseless drive had held the men who labored at their building. For three months the men at the head of the nation had waited and played the game on the national chess-board while they waited.

That they had played well was shown by the fact that the Japanese had not materially improved their position in that time. Their lines had advanced slightly in some districts, but seemed unable to push farther in the face of the ceaseless harassment to which their flanks were constantly subjected.

Now the fires in the forges died, the furnaces ceased to roar. The last casting, the last bit of forging was done.

In the great shed which arched above them three mighty concave diamonds stood in ever nearing completion. Day and night the rattle and clang of a score of riveting machines kept the air aquiver. Through their spidery framework red-hot rivets cut ruddy paths of fire.

Meade Stillman, white of face, leaner, thinner, harder than ever before, stood in the shed and watched the side-plates swung into position on the concrete things of his dream.

It seemed to him that the ringing blows of the pneumatics were not only driving home the rivets in the giant frames, which rose above him as he stood leaning forward on wide-spread limbs, but that they were fastening into the mass with each blow, something of the youth, the strength, the hopes, the high ambitions which had been his in the oasis; and that with each blow they robbed him of some of the old naturalness of thought and feeling, and left him a little more like the men about him, a little better able to cope with things as he found them; perhaps a little bit more able to win his country's battle and then remove the cloud from the name of his father and bring another exile back from his place in the hills.

And each blow toward the completion brought nearer that day when he should win the right to return to Bernice and claim the fulfilment of her promise. He smiled, and some of the tire of tension went out of his eyes for the time.

The work of assembling went on apace, with the same ceaseless drive which had characterized all the rest of the undertaking. Little figures of men crawled over the framework of the ships like spiders in a web.

The sound of their endeavors made an inferno of noise in the shed where they worked. Night and day, day and night, the rivets flashed to the "gunmen," were driven home and welded the parts into a whole. The mighty hollow diamonds began to take more solid aspect as their sheathing of steel was fastened to their ribs.

Huge, uncouth, unlike anything the world of war had heretofore witnessed, they were coming into being. The pygmy thing which had called them into existence walked to and fro among them, speaking a word of direction here, a word of caution or insistence there.

A pipe between his teeth at times

eased the tire of his muscles and brain. Over and between the growing structures the blue arcs sputtered by night and ofttimes by day when the light was dull. At such times the great shed became a cavern where gnomes toiled at an endless task.

By now another task was added to Meade's already heavy burden. In another part of the city the magnetic bombs, which were to furnish the ammunition of the destroyers, were being prepared. Each day now, Stillman entered a speedy machine and was driven to the ammunition factory to supervise the most important of the details attending their production.

Sometimes he stopped and took Bernice with him, that her presence, the sound of her voice, might rest him and give him back something of poise. More than she knew, her influence helped to perfect the mighty engines of war.

Again and again she came to the plant and stood with him in the shed and talked to him of their progress, exclaiming as they took shape, until his enthusiasm, worn by long working and infinite attention to detail, woke afresh at her faith, and rose up to master some new obstacle to the final success.

And though neither of them knew it, Fate was working her purpose with the man. There were times when the brain which answered a thousand daily questions, solved a thousand points of unforeseen perplexion, was not entirely normal; when the strain and the tire had worn its finer bearings until they no longer ran quite true.

Little by little, as Bernice watched him growing thinner, sterner of face, deeper of eye, and fretted in wakeful nights, while he, equally sleepless, labored, he was being changed into the man who must take one of these monster constructions, and with it go forth to the slaying of other men. The Meade Stillman who came back from the oasis could not have done it in cold-blooded purpose without an ordeal of compunction. The Stillman who worked obsessed by that purpose, could and would, when his work at the plant was done.

And now, by the middle of February, the last plate was in position, the firing tubes for the shells were in place, the interior controls and driving plants were installed. All and everything was nearing completion, and a force of men, slung in swings, mounted on stages, were painting the hulls a bright azure blue, which should make them well nigh invisible against a clear sky.

Save for installing the radio-active plates, little remained to be done, and Meade estimated that a week would see this, too, completed.

But rapid as had been the work, swift as had been the pace at which bone and muscle and brain had driven forward under the urging of need, the Japanese again struck with their usual selection of the unprepared moment, before their antagonist was fully ready for the blow.

During the weeks and months, when Meade drove his men to their tasks and himself to the point of collapse, the heads of the nation had not been idle. Every nerve was bent to the mobilization of an immense army near Hagerstown in the State of Maryland.

Men, arms, and ammunition in immense quantities were collected at this point in an apparent preparation for an active campaign with the breaking up of winter. Japan picked up the gauntlet at once.

With her usual rapidity she centralized her Eastern forces so far as consistently possible, and, relying upon her advantage in the aerial torpedo-bombs—which had so far done such effective work — advanced northward from Washington along the Potomac, sweeping the countryside as she went and preparing for a decisive struggle, which she hoped would break the organized resistance it had taken the States months to build up. Horse, foot, and guns, she threw forward fifty thousand men in her army.

They faced a hundred thousand volunteer troops, built up about a nucleus of veteran soldiers, the remnants of the original regular army.

But Japan's fifty thousand were trained and seasoned fighters; and the new weapon, which she brought with her in great quantities on her advance, gave her more than an advantage. She took Harper's Ferry as a base and conducted her field movements from there.

By the eighteenth of the month it became evident that she intended to precipitate an engagement; that the strategy of the United States, which had aimed at causing her to centralize her forces, had been successful; but that it behooved them to be ready for her next move, lest they be caught in an unbreakable grip before they themselves expected.

With somewhat anxious minds an inquiry was sent from the Strategy Board to Meade on the eighteenth, asking for a definite date of completion for the aero-destroyers. He replied that he would finish by the night of the twenty-first.

Already he had planned a christening of his machines for Washington's birthday, and was positive that he would be ready if every minute was used.

Bernice and Darling and he had even adopted the names. The original machine, the first laid down, was to be called the "Miracle," and Meade had been specially commissioned to command her. The second would be known as the "Bernice," and would be captained by Darling, with Arkel as his lieutenant. And the third was to be named "The Stillman," with Monsel, who had resigned from the Board for the purpose, as her governing head.

The Strategy Board received Stillman's report and acted in accord.

Word was sent to the commanders in the field to avoid any general engagement until the machines were ready. It is a matter of record that they tried, until such time as it became a choice of abandoning what appeared to be an advantageous position and retreating in the face of a strong and aggressive foe, with the attendant perils of such a movement.

Throughout the morning of the twentieth Japan massed her fighting men along the entire front of the American position. Numerous skirmishes occurred between scouting parties of either side, and it became absolutely certain that the Orientals were advancing to an immediate attack.

Word was flashed to Chicago, and after a serious deliberation orders were given to hold the present position rather than fall back farther.

About 2 P.M. on the twentieth Japan opened her attack by a turning movement directed against the American right flank. Until nightfall the battle raged fiercely with a frightful loss on the American side, due mostly to the long range work of the aerial bombs, which burst above their positions with telling effect.

The most spectacular event of the day was the work of Colonel Gotz's newly organized aviation squad, numbering a hundred fliers.

At the beginning of the attack they rose and engaged a squad of the Japanese air-men, delivering a terrible punishment upon them, until the battle in the air was stopped by the flight of the Orientals and the directing of the aerial bombs against the American machines. Some twenty of these were literally blown to atoms, and the rest returned inside their own lines.

Meade had run up to Gethelds for dinner when the word was received detailing the American's partial defeat and the doubling back of their right wing. Gethelds was at the Board, which had held him since morning. It was a message from that body, relayed from the plant, which gave the information. They were urging, begging, pleading, for haste in his completion of the machines.

He came back from the phone, white-lipped, spoke briefly to Bernice of the message, and picked up a glass of wine beside his plate. At a gulp he tossed it off and set down the glass. "I must go, dear," he said quickly. "I've promised them to try and hurry. Good-by."

"Hurry," grated the girl. "Oh, it's been nothing but hurry, hurry, hurry, since the start. Can't they realize that you're human—that you're flesh and bone; that you tire; that you're worked to skin and bone with their hurry now? Oh, Meade dear, you can't go all night again. You're on the verge of collapse. Your eyes are so tired, dear—even your voice is tired."

"Don't," he interrupted. "I can stand another night. I must. Can't you see that they've struck before we were ready, sweetheart? Do you know that twenty thousand brave men died or were wounded to-day, Bernice? Twenty thousand! What is my tire to that, little woman? Come, kiss me, and let me go. They need me."

All night he drove as he had never driven.

Soaking in perspiration, his hair disheveled, his face doubly white under the smudges of his exertions; together with Belden he worked in the skin of the Miracle, installing the plates. Midnight came, and he paused to drink a cup of scalding hot coffee. Morning came, and he labored on, hollow-eyed.

Noon came, and he swept a hand across his brow when he straightened to check the dizzy whirling of his brain. He sent out for the latest reports from the front, where men were holding grimly on and waiting for him to finish. He heard them and plunged back to his work, strengthened and driven by the thought that each minute of it was being bought by at least one human life.

At six o'clock he straightened and turned to Belden with a ghastly smile of triumph. While the old man waited, he touched a lever and threw it slightly backward, as one moves the lever of a throttle. A quiver shook the fabric in which they were standing.

It lifted slightly and swung, perhaps, a foot from the floor of the shed. "It is finished," said Stillman quite calmly. "Can you finish the others to-night and to-morrow if I take the Miracle to-night?"

Belden's eyes flashed assurance. "I will finish," he replied.

Outside, in the shed, a babble of cries and shouts and questions had arisen among the workmen who had seen the great ship lifting. They gathered about her door and waited until Meade appeared, with Belden behind him.

A mighty cheer burst from their throats, and they pressed about him, reaching for his hands. At another time it would have given him elation, now it seemed to him that he was too utterly tired. He walked with such speed as he could muster to the phone and informed the waiting Board that he was ready.

"Give me Monsel for my lieutenant this first trip. His machine isn't ready," he requested. "The ammunition is aboard and the crew waiting."

"Can you go without a trial?" came the question.

"I will," he said shortly, and hung up.

He rose, turned, and drew a heavy ulster over his sweat-soaked clothing, went down, and was driven to Bernice.

Through the night and the day she had waited, her heart torn by her love and her worry. With her arms about him, she led him to his room and closed the door softly behind him.

Though he did not know it, she crouched outside its panels until he had bathed and donned his uniform, already waiting for his need for many days. He found her there when he came out, belted and buttoned, his insignia of Commander glinting on shoulder and collar, and swept her into his arms.

"Sweetheart," he whispered, draw-

ing her close and feeling her quiver against him.

She led him down and compelled him to eat, sitting beside him, not to lose a moment of his nearness. Her lips were as bright with fever, her eyes wide with a tragedy of thought, yet the hand which touched his was of icy coldness, and it quivered and shook. "You are going — to-night?" she whispered dryly, with a faltering tongue.

"As soon as I may," he answered. "I ought to be gone now, but I have driven to the last grain of endurance. I had to catch my breath, and I had to see you."

"But you haven't tried the Miracle yet" she objected. "You are doubling the danger. If something should be wrong. Oh, Meade, I am so frightened."

"Nothing is wrong," he spoke with assurance. "And they need me over there. Dear heart, they need me so much. Have you seen the results of to-day's battle?"

She nodded dumbly.

"Thirty thousand lost—our army retreating," he muttered. "What is the risk when they need me like that?"

"It is all my life to me, Meade," she faltered. "Oh, I know I am only one woman, and that what I say is selfish. I know that those women care as much for their men as I do for you—perhaps. But you're mine—mine—and it was I brought you to do this thing. It will be me who caused your death, if anything happens. Oh, Meade, Meade—promise me that you'll come back—to me." She paused, biting her lips, fighting back her tears.

"Come back to *you,*" said Stillman. "I'll come back to you, Bernice, in spite of all the yellow fiends out of perdition. Now, good-by, my own little wife. Come— Good-by."

Long into the night a white-faced woman sat beside a window, looking out into the east. And despite the ache which choked her breathing, her eyes were dry and burning. And the thoughts she thought were long thoughts, which always came back to the point where they began.

In the gray of a new dawn, she crept, childlike, into the arms of a gray-faced man, who came wearily home, and wept.

CHAPTER XVIII.

All for His Country.

THE night of the twenty-first was a night of horror with the American army in the field. After the reverse of the twentieth, on which the right wing had been shattered by the Japanese attack, it became necessary to fall back and take up a new position to the northeast of that originally held.

The result was that the engagement of the twenty-first was fought a good many miles nearer the historic town of Gettysburg than that of the preceding day. And the second day was a greater exhibition of unrestrained slaughter than the one before.

For the first time the Japanese came to close quarters, hurling their infantry at the American lines, in an endeavor to sweep them before their assault; showering the positions with their artillery fire, sending their aeroplanes above them, and engaging the American flyers. In addition the aerial bombs kept up their deadly work.

By nightfall of the twenty-first there was but one thought actuating the minds of the American Commander and his staff, and that was to hold on somehow until the long-heralded aero-destroyers should arrive.

But the holding on was becoming a troublesome question. Already fifty thousand men were killed or wounded by the two days' fighting. Half the available strength which had faced the Japanese had been destroyed.

So far as known Japan had lost but slightly, her main casualties having occurred in the charges of the second day, when she had apparently sought

to crush all resistance at once, rather than by degrees, as she must have thought she could. With fifty thousand, any longer resistance was not to be thought of.

It was decided to fall back still further toward Gettysburg, and compel the enemy to follow, in the hopes that the inevitable defeat might be postponed, or the aero-destroyer arrive during the next day, as promised.

During the night every road leading north from the field of battle became a congested highway of travel. The weather had been typical of the month, and the red clay grew into a feet and wheel-churned batter, through which infantry plodded and cavalry splashed.

Field guns and caissons, their horses lunging and straining under the frantic lashing of the artillery drivers, rushed along them, careening into ruts and out again, with a lurch and a bang, the gunners clinging to the jouncing trucks, or leaping down to wallow in the cold wet mud and the darkness, and lift them from some hole too deep for the panting horses to overcome.

Giant armored motors, carrying aerial guns for the defense against aeroplanes, throbbed along the column; mired to the hubs, and grew into the centers of a mass of straining, sweating, cursing men, who strove to free them and send them forward.

Here and there a fire lighted from a fence or a confiscated out-house of some farm, sent ruddy flares across the darkness, and silhouetted a halted huddle of chilled figures, seeking to cluster nearer to its warmth.

One thing, and only one, relieved that agony of human suffering, toil, and endeavor. The night was cloudy, partly veiling in its murky thickness, the toiling columns from any chance aeroplane, which the enemy might send up as a scout, and to add to the already dreadful slaughter, by dropping bombs upon the hurrying masses of men.

Throughout the night both sides did keep several planes in the air, however, and now and then they met. Now and then the sound of shots fell down from the cloudy heavens, and tiny dots of fire showed where human passions rose high above the earth and locked in strife.

Now and then a crumpled thing of cloth and rods and stays hurtled downward, and crashed dully upon the sodden fields above which it had flown, and lay there a monument of defeat.

Yet as dawn approached, it became evident that the army would win to the new position selected for it. Little by little the struggling columns converged upon their assigned destination. Batteries of artillery swung from the rutted roads, at the signal of a drawn-faced aide, and turned into fields, to drop their trails and leave their guns in position for the first attack of the oncoming foe.

Their caissons were parked behind them, and their gunners dropped down about them, for a few precious moments of sleep. Regiments shuffled to right and left, this way and that; and having reached their assigned location for the last desperate grapple, sank on their arms and rested.

The morning broke heavily overclouded, with a mist-like cloud of chilled vapor shrouding the lower swales and hollows. The first of the aeroplane scouts darted up, and whirred off to the south on the outlook for the Japanese advance. Tiny fires sprang up along the American position, where the troops were making some sort of shift at a warm drink or a bite to eat.

All commissariat arrangements had fallen inadequate in that hurried retreat to this new and final position. It was this row of twinkling fire flares through the mist which first met the eyes of Meade and Monsel, as they swam high above the plain.

The latter's hand fell on Meade's arm, where he sat at the controls of the Miracle. His face was tense with excitement as he pointed below. "Do you see it, Stillman?" he whispered,

as though his words might carry too far. "We're over some position. The question is, whose?"

Meade nodded. Beneath them a dim shadow flitted by to the south.

"Aeroplane," said Stillman. "Scout going south. We're above our own lines, I believe, old man." He cut out the driving motors. The Miracle floated over the fire-lit mists. "I understood they were to fall back toward Gettysburg, and by the chart that's where we are right now, Monsel. I think we have arrived."

His voice quivered as he spoke.

Very slowly he let the giant thing he controlled sink downward. Softly, silently, without a tremor, it settled toward the line of fires. A hundred feet from the ground he checked it.

Peering downward, Monsel and he could see the groups of shivering men huddled on the ground about the little blazes. Behind them the crew of the air-ship pressed and gazed in excited interest. Meade turned to a speaking megaphone in the side of the ship.

Until then not one of the men below them had glanced up to where they hung. He sent his voice out in a hail.

Heads were lifted, turned, raised upward. To the men below it seemed that a something, half seen, dim, ghostly, immense, hung above them. Numbed by cold and tire, they stood and sought to make it out.

Again Meade spoke: "What regiment is that?"

The English-speaking voice seemed to wake understanding. "Fifth Pennsylvania," some one answered. "Who are you?"

"The Stillman air-ship. I want field headquarters," called Meade. "Which way from here?"

A sergeant pointed. "Over there—mile and a half," he directed, and added a question: "You ain't th' Miracle, are you? Say—you ain't—"

"Yes." Stillman touched his levers, and the ghost shape vanished in the fog and headed in the direction the sergeant had pointed. Out of that fog came a sudden cheering. Above the soft purr of the motors the men in the destroyer heard it.

It swelled and seemed to run beneath them as they flew, keeping pace, as the word of the arrival spread from regiment to regiment throughout the far-flung front.

In the headquarters tent the American commander raised his head as the sound of that cheering stole inside. "What's that?" he snapped shortly to one of his staff. "It sounds like cheering, but what for? God knows we've little to cheer about. And yet— By Heavens it is!"

He sprang to his feet.

The excited face of an aid appeared at the fly of the tent. He saluted in a scarcely correct manner and burst into speech. "There's something coming down, sir. It ain't no aeroplane, an' I don't know what it is, but it's pretty big. It looks like a dirigible, but—"

His words died as the General, forgetting all dignity or pose, leaped toward the outer world and raised his eyes aloft.

There, scarcely fifty feet up and steadily descending, he saw a vast outline, like a Brobdingnagian torpedo. While he watched it grounded without sound, and a door flew open in its side. Two men stepped forth to confront him.

He in advance brought a hand smartly to salute and began speaking: "General, I have to report the Miracle arrived."

The General seized the hand of the man who had addressed him. "Thank God that it has, sir," he responded with feeling.

"I was to report to you for orders," said Meade. "You know Captain Monsel?"

"By report," the General acknowledged, shaking hands. "Stillman, are you ready for action?"

"All ready, General," Meade smiled.

The clouds in the east began breaking. Through them a bar of sunlight

shot across the landscape. The gray mists trembled beneath its touch. Meade raised his face to the upper heavens and saw blue sky.

"Good!" he exclaimed. "With a clear sky I can come above them like a spirit of retribution whenever you give the word."

An air scout shot whirring out of the south, circled and slid down in front of the headquarters tent. "Sir," he began, and stopped in sheer surprise at the thing he saw. In a moment, however, he caught himself and reported the Japanese as coming up rapidly from the south.

All along the east the clouds were breaking. A gentle wind began to fan about the men as they stood, and lifted the ensign above the General's tent.

Meade smiled and nodded to Monsel in satisfaction. Before the wind the mist was rolling up like a mighty curtain and showing the waiting army stretched far beyond them. From somewhere, far away, came a little crackle of rifle-fire.

The General swept his gaze around. "The clouds are breaking, I think," he remarked.

Stillman answered him, smiling: "You are right, sir; the clouds *are* breaking." There was a double meaning to his words.

Several dark little spots appeared above the southern horizon and rushed down upon them. They were Japanese air scouts, hovering along their army's front.

They came on with the confidence of former success. A bugle sounded. A roaring whir broke out on the air.

A dozen American planes rose and darted toward the others. Suddenly the aerial gun on an armored motor woke into action, firing small explosive shells at the enemy's machines. The crackle of rifle fire to the south and west was growing more steady and gaining in volume.

Far off in that direction a great flash lit up the heavens. A thunderous roar beat upon the ears.

"An aerial bomb," said the General in explanation to Meade.

Scarcely had he spoken when a second flash and report woke the echoes in the direction of the American aeroplanes which had risen against the Japanese. It passed and showed a tattered ruin swirling dizzily around and around, like a wounded bird, as it fell.

Meade's teeth closed with a snap, and he turned to his superior in unspoken question.

The General nodded. "Any time you are ready, Stillman," he said.

Meade smiled in a manner almost savage and swung on his heel. "Come on, Monsel," he directed, and strode to the Miracle's side. In that moment his one thought, his one wish, his one determination, was to carry a terrible vengeance to his country's foes.

Under his manipulation of the levers the Miracle leaped aloft. The sun had come quite clear, and they rose against a clear sky. As suddenly as though it had faded into thin air, the giant fabric which had rested before them vanished from the sight of the General and his clustering staff.

The General gasped. "What—" he began, and lowered his gaze to the faces of the men about him.

"It was blue—I think that against this sky we can't—"

"My God! You can't see it because of its color. But it's up there," stammered the Commander. "And the Japs—they can't see it, either." He uncased a pair of binoculars and fastened them on the distant forces of the enemy, now beginning to appear here and there.

Meade sent the Miracle straight up for a thousand feet. When the aneroid showed that elevation, he switched in the turbines which dragged the great ship forward and slid away into the south, toward the flying dots of the Japanese air-ships. Below him, without suspecting that he flew above him, the American machines were flying and signaling the position of the advancing forces.

The last of the mist had risen and melted away.

The men in the Miracle could see the troops of their nation ranged across the landscape. In response to the signals of the air scouts, a regiment of infantry sprang to life and raced off to some new position, where they might be more effective in meeting some movement of the approaching forces.

A body of cavalry, which Monsel recognized as the "Black Horse" and named, raced flounderingly across the fields, their guidons fluttering like tiny specks of color, their horses seeming more like flattened shadows than animals as they rode, to those who looked from above. Plainly they were also changing front for some purpose dictated by the man who moved them like pieces on the chessboard of war.

Without warning, their galloping mass was blotted temporarily out by a sheet of flame.

It was so sudden, so unexpected, that Monsel gasped. There had been nothing to lead one to expect that blinding flash in the lower air. In front or on the flank of the horse there had been no sign of an enemy.

The menace of that explosion had certainly come from a distance. Peering down, he waited until he could see through the haze of the explosion. His eye fell upon a confused tangle of men and horses struggling to free themselves from or avoid the mangled remnants of what seemed to Monsel an entire troop of their command.

With a grip in his throat he understood now, from personal observation, why it was that the American armies had suffered one continual defeat—why each and every commander of their forces had said over and over again: "We can't get at them."

The bomb which had torn a score of men and horses to pieces had come from far, far away, aimed and timed to strike and burst with hellish precision. A surge of rage woke in Monsel's breast at this, to him, almost cowardly slaughter of men by an enemy who remained beyond range of danger and mercilessly blew them to pieces.

He turned to Stillman. "Hit it up, and let's give them a taste," he begged.

Meade increased the Miracle's speed. They swept forward. The row of Japanese planes were no longer spots, but outlines now. Stillman nodded to Monsel. "Use the small canister shells," he said.

The Captain turned. His voice rang through the interior of the destroyer in crisp command:

"Load—tubes!"

Ten men leaped into action, like hounds from the leash. From the ammunition boxes, standing ready with open lids, they lifted numbers of the magnetic bombs and thrust them into the pneumatic tubes which were to vomit them forth. A soft sighing whispered through the ship as the air in the tubes was compressed behind them.

Monsel passed down the rows of men at the tubes and spoke in direction: "One-tenth compression on the bottoms, quarter sides, half rear. Steady now, boys. We want these things to just drop all over this air fleet of theirs, and pick out their own marks by means of their magnetic finders. When I give the word, sides fire first, bottoms second, and rear last, at intervals of two counts. Watch my hand. I'll give you the intervals."

The Miracle was rising. She shot up to five hundred feet above where the Japanese fliers were circling above their army's advance. She slowed. Beneath her the little planes darted to and fro. Meade nodded.

Monsel's lips snarled back. "Fire!" rang his command. His hand began to bob up and down—one, two—one, two.

Plop — Plop — Plop! coughed the side tubes, the bottoms, the rear. A venomous swarm of little shells darted from the great destroyer and spread beneath and beyond her. She darted forward with incredible swiftness.

Behind and below her rose a rending crackle of explosions in the air. Each little bomb plunged downward like a vindictive hornet, seeking a mark for its sting. The magnets in their heads drew them toward the metaled parts of the Japanese planes. They darted in and struck and clung and exploded. A series of flashes sparkled along the line of fliers, like daylight fireworks exploding.

And the sting of the metal hornets was deadly. The air-ships seemed to vanish into the air.

It became full of tattered strings and fragments which had been men and machines. A bloody rain, mixed with pieces of cloth, and metal, and flesh, began dropping downward upon the heads of the Japanese advance.

It paused. Men and officers glanced aloft. They saw the flashes, they heard the explosions, they saw their airmen vanish — and nothing else. Above them the sky was clear and blue and golden with sunshine—empty now of even their own planes which had flown there.

Off to the south and west a Japanese battery was coming up, its horses toiling to drag it through the mud, its men laboring with them and straining at the miring wheels. Meade swung the Miracle toward it. He spoke to Monsel: "The little shells are the stuff for aeroplanes, all right, Captain. Now I think I'll eliminate that artillery over yonder. Load with small shell again for that." He sent the destroyer toward the line of the battery's advance.

Once more Monsel's voice barked an order. Again the pneumatics sighed as they received once more the clusters of small missiles, such as they had sprayed over the vanished planes.

Once more Stillman checked his momentum and swung above the fore-doomed string of guns. Monsel, with range-finder at eye, cried his directions to the tube pointers: "One thousand down, five hundred forward, fronts and bottoms. Have you got it?"

"All set, sir," panted a pointer.

"Then—let go!"

Plop!

A deluge of flame, a rending tempest of destruction struck upon horses and men and guns. Again the hornets stung them, and their sting was death. They fell downward and stuck to the muzzles of guns, to the metal tires of wheels, and exploded. The flash of their explosion died and left behind it ruin, the twitching leg of a dying horse, the scattered bodies of quiet or writhing men.

The Miracle leaped aloft—a thousand—two thousand feet, and paused.

And almost as she paused, in the air above the riven battery, a flash of light tore across the air. Another and another followed in blinding flash and rending concussion.

Stillman turned to Monsel, and a grim smile twitched his somewhat pallid lips. "I think that was something like an inspiration," he remarked. "They got the idea pretty quickly and pretty nearly got at us with their bombs."

"But the range— How could they know where—" began the Captain.

"Saw us," said Meade. "I forgot for the moment that we're between them and the sun. Our color don't help us under those conditions. Well, no matter. They missed, and we're way up now."

With a jerk he threw in his motors and sent the Miracle into the west like the darting flash of a hawk. "We're going to get 'em, Monsel," he whispered with a hissing intonation. "Get them—get them. Big shell now, Monsel. I'm going after their damnable bombs."

Like a great shell herself, the Miracle shot forward.

Through the windows of the floor and sides Monsel could look down and forward. The Miracle had swept west and turned, and was coming back into the eye of the sun.

Below their advance stretched a grouping of Japanese about several

long-barreled weapons, into which, as he watched, they were thrusting slender torpedo-shaped missiles, which he knew must be the dreaded aerial bombs. Once discharged, they would unfold their wings and fly on their mission of death.

Even as he recognized the thought, lanyards snapped. A faint haze of smokeless powder rose from the tilting muzzles of the great rifles, and their crews fell upon them for reloading.

Behind them an ammunition-train stood parked, and from it other men were running to and fro with the bombs for the now open breeches.

"Get their range," snapped Stillman in a voice of supreme excitement.

"Five hundred down, a thousand forward!" called Monsel. His tones quivered.

"Five hundred down, a thousand forward!" barked the pointers.

Stillman swung the Miracle about. "Hold hard; we'll get the concussion from this," he advised. "Now—if you're ready— Fire!"

"Fire!" echoed Monsel.

The magnetic shells sprayed forward and down.

The Miracle shot upward to escape what must follow. Below, where the great guns rested, where the ammunition was parked, where the crews ran back and forth from caisson to gun, or thrust the aerials into the breeches, a vast, wide-flung sheet of fire and blue and yellow flame burst and spread into a whirlpool of thunderous sound.

For an instant it seemed that some long-hidden and prisoned volcano had burst its bounds and spouted forth in a great pool of gaseous brilliance. Beneath that flaming maelstrom of death, little black figures which were men ran and stumbled and fell and lay still, or, caught in its grasp, whirled madly with outflung arms and spraddling legs, swirling round and around, and over and over in the air, to fall back and lie in mangled huddles; or, still more savagely seized by an irresistible force of destruction, disintegrated into ghastly fragments which had been arms or legs or trunks a moment before.

What the magnetics had started, their concussion finished by exploding a great part of the aerial bombs themselves.

A thunderous concussion rose and grumbled, crashed and growled across the sunlit country. A tremor of the earth itself began and spread in shaking ripples, which might have been an earthquake in its seeming.

A vast wave of displaced air, compressed, forced back from the rarified center of the disturbance, swept across the district until trees and bushes bent and swayed, and men within its range were thrown to earth by its terrific lash.

High though it rode, the Miracle which had wrought the frightful cataclysm of wind and noise and fire, rocked and swayed, and but for her powerful gyroscopes, which kept it on on even keel, would have been engulfed in the destruction of its own making. Kneeling upon its floor, Monsel covered his eyes to shut out the picture below.

"Hail, Columbia, happy land!
Hail, ye heroes, heaven-born band,
Who fought and bled—"

The sound of some one singing struck upon his ears. He uncovered his eyes and staggered to his feet.

Meade Stillman sat at the controls, gazing below at the devastation induced by the Miracle's fire, and singing the words of the national anthem.

Monsel ran forward. A dreadful fear for Stillman's mental balance, strained through months, assailed him. What, he asked himself, if a madman sat at the Miracle's helm?

"When war spreads her wide desolation."

He reached Stillman's side. "Stillman! Meade!" he gasped.

Meade turned and met his startled gaze. He jerked his head forward and down and checked his song.

"They've felt a touch of desolation, eh, Monsel?" he remarked. "I wonder what their commanders are thinking right now? We gave them 'Hail Columbia' all right. Well—what had we better do now?" He turned dazed eyes upon the captain.

"Go back. We've done enough," said Monsel. "The Miracle has happened, Meade. Look there!" He pointed into the north.

Under the shock of the destruction of their airmen, the fate of the artillery, and the catastrophe to their ariel battery, the Japanese wavered; their advance checked. The men in the destroyer could look across the wide field of action. Here and there a horseman—an aid—galloped at frantic speed.

On an eminence signal-flags were rising and falling.

The thin, sweet voice of a bugle came faintly up to their ears through an open port. While they watched from the now motionless Miracle a battery of field-guns, far to the front, suddenly limbered up and began trotting into the south.

A column of infantry halted, about faced, and took up the back track. To the south other columns checked their advance and stood waiting.

Stillman laughed shortly. "They seem to have suffered a change of mind," he remarked.

A crackle of firing came up. The American aeroplanes to the north were signaling wildly now. A cloud of smoke rose on the hillside below the headquarters tents and came swiftly downward.

The armored motors had swung down their long aerial guns and were rushing toward the bewildered Japanese, firing their small explosive shells at the columns of the infantry as they came.

Roaring and belching fire and smoke they swept to the attack. Behind them divisions of American infantry were in motion, coming southward now. A battery of light artillery came up on the run, swung into line, and let fly a volley which swept a retreating regiment of Orientals.

Again Stillman laughed.

"Well, they can get at them now. Go to it, you devils!" he shouted as though the men below him could hear. "They'll get a chance to see how we can fight on an even break now, Monsel. Gad! Look at those chaps serve their guns!"

He indicated the light battery now half-veiled in a haze of smokeless from its own discharges.

The Japanese were withdrawing all along the line, yet it was an orderly retreat. Despite the unseen check which they had received they were still a dangerous foe, drawing back in excellent order to recover from this first reverse.

Stillman shook his head. "They need another little touching up, Monsel," he chuckled, and started the Miracle once more. "Try the small cannister-shells again. I'm going to sail over them not too far up, and show them something new in the line of war. I think I can hurry their steps. Lively now, Monsel." He let the Miracle drop to five hundred feet above the sodden fields.

Under Monsel's orders the tubes were again loaded with the deadly little shells, and as Stillman began moving slowly above the lines of the retreating army they sprayed upon them.

Again and again they spat from the great hulk and fell in a hail of death upon the now terror-stricken men below. The retreat became a rout.

No longer was any semblance of order maintained. Artillerymen cut loose from their guns and left them fast in the mud of the fields. Infantry divisions and brigades and corps split asunder and became masses of flying men, who ran from an invisible foe—a something which hurled death upon them.

The bombs fell and fell. They clung to the bodies of cannon, clung

and stuck and burst. Even upon the barrels of rifles they fell and spread instant and dreadful destruction. As they ran the privates of the Japanese divisions threw away their weapons, stripped off their side-arms, freed themselves of every metal object which might prove a lure for the clinging death which seemed to flow above their lines.

Once, twice Meade sent the destroyer from end to end of their width, turned again, and suddenly sank forward against his levers.

Springing to him, Monsel found his shoulders shaking, his whole body racked by nervous tremors. Seizing him by the shoulders he shook him. "Stillman, Stillman!" he cried hoarsely.

Plop—plop—sighed the pneumatic tubes of death.

Stillman raised a white, haggard face, from which everything save a dreadful horror had fled. "Stop it!" he cried out, struggling to rise. "Stop it, Monsel! My God, we're worse than they were! It's worse than killing penned rabbits at a drive!"

"Cease firing!" Monsel's voice arrested the hurrying men at the tubes. The hiss and pop of the pneumatics died. The Miracle swung above a field thick-strewn with the wreckage of war and the flying remnants of an army.

Without a word Meade turned back to his station and headed the ship north toward the headquarters tent.

Armored motors, field artillery, infantry, cavalry streamed beneath him as he went. The entire American army was returning over the road they had followed the night before. And this time they were the ones who followed an army in retreat. But to Stillman it was blotted out. A sick revulsion was already engulfing his spirit. He wished he could go up to a house that he knew of and lay his head in the soft lap of a girl and listen to her voice—and just—rest.

He grounded the Miracle before the headquarters tent, rolled back the door in her side, and staggered out. The General was standing as he had left him, glasses to eyes. He whirled and stretched out his hands. "Stillman—" he began.

Meade drew himself up with an effort and saluted. And despite all that it meant his voice was almost listless as he made his report: "General, the enemy is in retreat." He hesitated for yet a moment and added: "And now, if you don't mind, I'd like to sleep."

CHAPTER XIX.

The Death of a Brave Man.

MONSEL explained the situation to the Commander-in-Chief, and by Meade's own suggestion took the Miracle under temporary command.

While Stillman threw himself upon a cot and slept the sleep of utter exhaustion, utterly dreamless, despite the terror of the last hours, the Captain again rose and followed the rout of the Japanese.

Monsel even went as far south as the Potomac and blew up the immense stores of munitions collected at the Harper's Ferry base. Thereafter he headed north again, to repeat the performance of the morning.

Two troop-trains rushing over the Hagerstown road fell victim to his swift assault and literally vanished from the rails as the magnetics struck the steel coaches and engines and blew them to bits.

His attack striking now from south to north added still more to the bewilderment of his foes, with its suggestion of several of the new air-craft hovering above them. The countryside became a vast warren across which men scuttered like rabbits, seeking escape.

Now and then they even caught sight of him, but without their aerial weapons they were powerless to stem

the tide of changed fortunes which had overwhelmed them. Robbed of their single means of superiority, they fell easy victims to the pursuing army, now their numerical superior, after the morning's slaughter.

Somewhere around four o'clock the exhausted remnants of their forces surrendered to the American pursuit, were disarmed, and received a ration, taken from their own captured stores.

Monsel returned to find Meade still sleeping in a tent surrounded by a special guard which the General had detailed to the purpose before following his army south. He picked him up, carried him aboard the destroyer, and flew slowly back until he picked up the new headquarters in the field.

The news of the victory was flashed far and wide across the nation, waking widespread jubilation. The name of the Miracle was on every speaking lip. In Chicago a celebration began at once and raged all day and most of the night.

It reached its climax of unrestrained excitement when the surrender of thirty thousand Japanese was bulletined about five o'clock. Vast swarms marched through the streets, singing and shouting. President Gilson received congratulations from his Cabinet with tears of relief and emotion in his eyes.

The Board of Strategy went into session at once, and at six o'clock an order issued to Darling. It was briefly to take the Bernice, now complete under Belden's efforts, and proceed eastward to capture or destroy the Japanese fleet in the Chesapeake, and so cut off that chance of escape from the now doomed Oriental forces.

Unlike the departure of the Miracle, that of the Bernice was not unmarked.

When the great roof of her housing was rolled back about seven, and she rose with every window and port brightly lighted in order that her outline might be visible to the watchers, a great crowd surged about the boundaries of the engineering works where she had been constructed and cheered until she faded from sight.

A massed band played national anthems as she rose in the slow majesty of her three hundred feet of length and pointed into the east and south. Darling heard that farewell and smiled.

Another farewell was warming his heart. Bernice, Gethelds, and President Gilson had stood by the little door in the side of the Bernice and bade him godspeed as Arkel and he stepped aboard. The last thing his eyes held as he threw his levers and rose from between the great shed's walls was a girl's white face and parted lips and the flutter of her hand.

Old Belden, standing with craned neck, lowered his face and met the same woman's eyes. He bowed slightly and she smiled. He approached.

"Mr. Stillman's saved his country, miss," he began. "An' Darling will help now with the work. I'll get the Stillman done to-night. They're wonderful things, miss—the work of a wonderful brain. They're miracles, all right. And if you don't mind, would you come up to the laboratory with me for a minute?"

Something in his words and expression urged her. She excused herself to her father and Gilson, and followed the stooping figure of Belden up the stairs to the laboratory, where he approached a safe, opened its doors, and withdrew a package.

With this he came back to her. "I want you to keep this, please, miss," he explained. "I told Meade he ought to put it in a safe place, but he had too much on him for one man at the last. But now that the ship has shown what it can do, it is dangerous to have them here. And I know no one will guard Stillman's interests as closely as you."

"What is it?" she questioned.

"The formula and working directions for making the plates," said

Belden. "Nothing must happen to them—they mustn't be stolen."

"Nothing shall happen to them," said Bernice with decision. She thrust the package into the low-cut throat of her dress, forcing it down out of sight against her body.

"I've burned all the other notes," Belden declared almost proudly. "Of course I saw Meade make them and helped him, but I won't tell."

Bernice smiled. "I am sure both Meade and I know that, Mr. Belden. He thinks a great deal of you, I know," she replied.

"Thank you, miss," said Belden. "You see, I grew very fond of Meade. And to think that now he's a national hero. You must be very proud of that boy of ours."

"I love him," the girl returned frankly. "You are an old man, Mr. Belden, and your experience must have taught you that a woman can say nothing more than that."

"Superlative degree," smiled the engineer. "Perhaps we had best be going back to your father. I've got to finish the Stillman yet to-night."

Morning found the Bernice within sight of the blue Chesapeake waters, flying steadily forward. The passage had been uneventful, and Darling and Arkel had spelled each other in watches, so that both were comparatively fresh. Both felt a quiver of tension, however, as their eyes caught the long line of gray shapes stretched beyond the mouth of the Potomac and realized that the moment of their work was at hand.

"We'll give them a few shells and see if they can take a hint," Harold decided.

Under Arkel's directions the bottom and forward tubes of the Bernice were charged with shell. Darling, sweeping up from the west, rode possibly a thousand feet above the fleet, when he checked his course and swung into line for the attack.

"Take the little fellow down there," he directed. "Gad! It seems a sort of cowardly thing to do after all, Arkel. Still"—his face hardened—"look what they did to our ships, and to New York. You remember what I told you about New York, Arkel, and how you said you'd get even if you got a chance. Well, this is your chance, I fancy. Play ball, Arkel, and get 'em over the plate."

Arkel nodded. "They're murderers, nuthin' else. It's comin' to 'em," he said harshly. He ran back to the pointers at the tubes, indicating the vessel to be attacked. Beneath the Bernice the fleet swam apparently lifeless save for a few small figures working about the decks. "A thousand down and a thousand forward," Arkel directed his pointers. A moment later he spoke almost softly: "Fire!"

An instant followed the plop of the tubes. Then—a series of explosions broke out along the superworks of the torpedo-boat below. The flash of their bursting passed and showed a dismantled hull riding the waters of the bay and listing slowly.

The fleet awoke to sudden life.

Darling waited long enough to hurl some dozen shells upon one of the cruisers, stripping it of superstructure and military masts, while the slow muzzles of the great rifles lifted toward him, then sent the Bernice leaping aloft, as the first stab of flame and smoke belched toward him from the fleet.

A shot struck the concave walls of the destroyer, glanced off and exploded to one side. The smile on Harold's lips widened at this proof of the difficulty of landing a crippling shot. Two or three other missiles rattled against the plates without other effect than a slight jarring of the ship.

An aerial bomb exploded off to one side as it rose from a ship below. Darling went a little higher to escape any possible elevation of the trajectories of the ship's rifles, and swung above them. Their gray shapes had changed to cotton balls of smoke far below on the water.

Under Arkel's urge, the Bernice began dropping shells into those soft looking whorls, which billowed above the firing ships. As quickly at it had begun the fleet stopped firing. The smoke of their discharging rifles drifted away and showed the white flag of surrender, whipping in the breeze.

Darling nodded in satisfaction.

"Got enough, eh, you beggars?" he chuckled. "Jove, Arkel, I'm glad. This isn't a bit like war, you know. Just a bit of pot hunting if you ask me. Well, let's go down and invite the commander to breakfast." He threw up his levers and let the Bernice sink slowly toward the now silent fleet. Slowly she sank down until she cleared the lapping water by a scant six feet. Behind her were the western shores of the bay, against which her long diamond-like shape swung outlined in majestic proportion. To the watching eyes of the fleet, just beyond her to the east, she must have seemed almost unreal in her sudden coming.

Megaphone at lips, Darling opened the little door in her side and spoke across the water: "The fleet, ahoy! Send your officers by boat, to arrange surrender!"

"Stay where you are. We understand," a voice replied in excellent English.

Darling stepped back and closed the door. He went back and seated himself at his controls. "Easy that, Arkel," he said smiling, and lighted a cigarette.

A thunderous roar engulfed the fleet, the Bernice, and rolled across the water. Even as Darling set flame to the tobacco between his lips, every gun in every turret on every ship of the Japanese vessels of war was brought to bear on the long, dim shape they had lured within effective distance.

In that one discharge they took a false and desperate chance of eliminating this new engine of war, and regaining their lost advantage at a blow.

Their shells struck with terrific weight and power at that short range, and, despite the angles of the destroyer's hull, she was picked up and driven sidewise by the force of the aggregate impact. Her crew hurled from their feet, sprawled across her floor in a tangle of arms and legs, and clawing fingers, and she reeled as though caught in the vortex of a tornado.

Yet despite all, it was chance which did her damage.

That point where the concave plates joined in an edge along her sides, was her one vulnerable spot, and upon that edgelike ridge a great shell impinged with an almost irresistible violence. Under its blow the walls bent and buckled, and but for the fact that the destroyer floated and yielded rather than offered a rigid resistance, she must have been riven into a hopeless wreck.

As it was, her inner skin first bent then cracked and splintered. The air of her conning chamber became full of flying bits of metal. Darling's lips relaxed on his cigarette. An expression of agony passed across his face. It grew pallid, and he lurched in his seat, clutching at his levers.

For in that moment of mortal anguish, his brain still maintained control. While a steel splinter tore through him, he clutched his levers and threw them back and down, with a final supreme effort; felt the Bernice respond to the lift of her plates, and sank unconscious from his seat to the floor.

The upward jerk freed the destroyer from the smoke; and Arkel, staggering to his feet, from where he had fallen, turned toward Darling. What he saw drove him to frantic action. Already the Bernice was five hundred feet up and still rising.

Darling lay doubled up behind his levers.

In a bound his Lieutenant reached his side, slammed up the levers to "stability" on the sextant, and checked the rise. Then with a dread-

ful pounding at his heart, he bent over Harold and straightened him so that he lay upon his back.

A thin, blood-stained froth was oozing from Darling's lips, and a stain on his tunic showed where the steel fragment had struck and pierced his chest. Arkel went to his knees. "Darling!" he choked hoarsely, "Darling!"

The pallid lips made no sound, and the eyes remained closed. A moist rattling, like air in water, came from the wounded man's throat. Arkel laid him down softly and sprang to his feet. A terrible rage woke in his breast.

He jerked around toward the now risen and awestricken crew, and burst into frantic speech: "Load! Load—you devils! Load up an' give them hell! What are you standing around for? Load up! They've killed him—killed him, damn them! Do you hear?"

He sank back beside the wounded man. "Harold," he said more softly. "Harold, old pal."

Unleashed, the crew of the Bernice sprang to their work. The cough and sigh of the tubes began to whisper a continuous song of death. It fell from the great destroyer in a metal hail, which struck upon turret and rifle tip, and superstructure and hull, and burst in sheeted flares of flame.

A magazine of a cruiser exposed by the destruction of her upper parts, blew up. Her great gray hull split asunder. A battle-ship mortally wounded, reeled and sank. The smaller craft vanished in dreadful swirlings, which rocked their larger sisters, and lashed the surface of the bay to a churning froth.

One by one they weighed anchor those great leviathians of war and sought to escape from that hail of dreadful vengeance. Arkel, who had wound a bandage about Darling, and carried him to a cot in the main room, danced from tube to tube and urged his men to a fury of action.

Some of the flying monsters grew into stripped wrecks, others burst into flames and exploded, still others wallowed on, pursued by the rage they had awakened, until they lost headway and became naught but ineffective bulks. Not until the last ship had grown into a battered ruin did Arkel give word to cease firing.

An hour had passed and the destruction was complete.

Then he went back and relieved the man he had put on the levers, that he himself might direct the fire of the tubes. He turned the Bernice into the west and began a slow journey toward the probable position of the American army.

She did not handle well.

The buffeting she had received, while not injuring her rising power, had destroyed her right vane, and seemed to have jammed her right-hand turbine so that she jibed in an irritating manner as she flew.

Another hour passed and one of the crew came and touched Arkel's shoulder. "Mr. Darling has opened his eyes," he announced.

Arkel left the Bernice swing at rest while he ran back and stooped above the cot where Darling lay.

He found his eyes opened as the man had said, and they turned toward him in question before Harold spoke: "Hello, Arkel!" he said faintly. "What about the fleet?"

"I wrecked 'em—every damned one," grated Arkel.

"They didn't play fair, did they, old chap?" said Darling with an effort.

"Well, they got theirs for it, right after," Arkel choked.

"And where are we?" questioned his commander.

"I was trying to get to the army. You ought to have a doctor," the Lieutenant answered. "But she don't fly well. They shot off a wing, an' a turbine is jammed."

Darling smiled faintly. "Do the best you can," he advised, and closed his eyes.

Arkel, his own eyes wet, and running over, stumbled back to his controls.

"You've got to do it—you've got to do it, Bernice," he muttered, as though the ship were a sentient being and could understand. He threw in the drive and they staggered forward. By two o'clock they sighted the American lines and sank down near a tent where a red cross whipped in the breeze.

Stillman and Monsel had just returned from a flight as it happened, and lost no time in hurrying across, when the crippled Bernice came down. They stood anxious and worried beyond any expression, while a surgeon examined the stricken man, and dressed his wound. When he picked up his dressing kit and left, Meade followed him outside.

"I want the truth, doctor," he requested quickly.

"Hours," said the surgeon, and turned away.

"No hope at all?" persisted Stillman with a sinking heart.

"None," was the answer. The surgeon faced him for an instant. "He knows it, too, Mr. Stillman. I read it in his eyes."

And so this was the end. The thought gripped Meade's heart as he climbed back aboard the battered Bernice, and came slowly to Darling's side. The end of a very brave life—of a true man.

Harold's eyes turned up to his, and he smiled. "The jig's up, eh, old chap?" he said almost lightly. "That doctor's eyes wouldn't back up the lie of his tongue. Oh, well— By the way, Bernice told me to give you her love, if we met."

Stillman's throat contracted. "Darling," he said thickly. "Old man, is there anything we can do? Can't I take you some place out of here?"

Harold's eyes lighted. "Yes—home," he said on a sudden.

"Home?" questioned Meade. "You mean to Virginia? The Japs are all over down there yet. We haven't cleaned them out yet."

Darling rolled his head on the pillow. "Not Virginia—Chicago," he responded. "'Home is where the heart is'—Meade. I want to see—Biddy—say good-by—you know. You don't—mind?"

"Mind? Great God, no!" said Stillman. "And I'll take you. Monsel, you will take charge of the Miracle. This boat is going to Chicago right away."

"But she won't fly," interrupted Arkel, who had come up in time to hear the remark. "A turbine's jammed and a wing's gone."

"Won't she?" Meade's words were almost savage, and in a way they echoed Arkel's of hours before. "She will for me. She's got to. I built her and she'll fly for me. Get your crew and some wrenches and steel bars. I'll make her fly."

He turned away forward to take charge of freeing the turbine.

An hour later the Bernice rose and fled into the west and north with Arkel and Stillman. Monsel remained in command of the Miracle, and his first act was to return to the scene of the morning's engagement and receive the final surrender of the now powerless and dreadfully punished fleet.

Stillman drove as he had never driven, even on that night of dread two days before, when he went to an army's rescue. Under her master's hand, the great ship cut through the air like a swallow.

They had left the American lines about four, and they followed the daylight westward, but twilight came and dusk and dark, and the stars twinkled above them as they rushed forward. Behind Meade as he drove, Arkel sat beside Darling and moistened a cloth from time to time, and laid it across his forehead.

Yet swift as was their flight, the news of their coming had flown before them along the wires, so that when late at night, they sank slowly

between the walls of the great shed at the plant, an ambulance was already waiting to receive the wounded man.

Very gently they lifted him up and bore him out, and slid the stretcher on which he lay beneath the cover of the motor, which would bear him swiftly where he wished to be. Meade had taken time to telegraph Bernice before starting west, and word was waiting at the sheds to bring Darling to the Gethelds home.

But the knowledge that he himself was soon to see Bernice for the first time since he had left her to save his nation, was well-nigh drowned in Stillman's heart, as he entered the ambulance and sat down at Darling's side. This was not the homecoming he had planned. Both himself and Darling had loved her and one of them was coming home—to die.

It was a sincere grief, born of respect for his rival, which he felt.

Once, and once only, Harold moaned as they sped through the late streets in the night. His hand groped out and found Stillman's. "Rotten way to call on a lady," he remarked with an effort at lightness which hurt his companion more than his screams would have done.

He neither moved nor spoke again until they reached the Gethelds home and he was borne into the hall, where a white-faced girl was waiting with wide gray eyes, in which lurked a soul-sick sorrow. "Hello, Biddy," he said as he saw her. "This warrior's coming home *on* his shield, as it happens."

Bernice bit her lips to suppress a cry.

Yet later, when she crept into his room, where they had laid him in a bed, she had fought back to some measure of calm, under Meade's words and her own efforts. She crossed to his bedside, bent above him. "Oh, Big Brother," she said softly—"oh, Big Brother!" choked, and could say no more.

Darling smiled faintly. "Little Sister," he murmured. He patted the coverlet on which his hand was lying. "Sit down—here beside me," he requested, and when she had complied he went on: "That's nice—awfully nice, Little Sister—nice and comfy. I suppose Meade's told you how it happened?"

"Yes," she whispered and burst into sudden passion. "Oh, the treacherous fiends—they're not human. No fate could be too dreadful for such monsters."

"Mustn't bawl them, Biddy," said Darling. "They're dead, you know. Arkel saw red and sunk most of them. Bit awful, in a way, but they rather made a bid for it. You see, I am just a victim of misplaced confidence."

He paused and a spasm twitched his face.

"Does it hurt you so? Are you in pain?" the woman questioned. Meade watched in sick silence from the other side.

"A little," said Darling. "But it's worth it to go out—here with you—like this."

"But you're not—going out," Bernice protested. "Now that you're here, you're going to get well again, Big Brother."

He shook his head. "What for?"

"Don't!" choked Bernice. Her shoulders began to shake. "Oh, Harold, don't. You remember I told you, I saw it all these months ago, in a sort of vision. It's my fault—all my fault. Oh—! I can't stand it! It's breaking my heart!"

"Forgive me. It was unkind," begged Harold. "I guess it just slipped out, little girl. But I've played the game to the last. I can't stick it much longer. I think I held on some way, all day, just because I knew you were at the end."

He paused and lay panting. Save for that there was no sound in the room beyond the woman's sobbing. In a moment he went on:

"Do you know, Biddy — I always used to think, that when the end *did* come—you'd be beside me—that your arms would sort of hold me back for a

little, and not let me slip away too fast. Well—you're here, and I'm going to be a bit selfish, and ask you for something, though I'm afraid may hurt you while it lasts.

"It's all right, though, dear, because Meade's here, and if he objects, we'll call it off. But—what I want—what I want, is for you to lift me up, and sit up here a little bit farther, and let me put my head back against you—unless it will tire you. Is it too much to ask? It won't be for long."

"No!" said the woman, almost fiercely. "Meade, help me!" She rose, and with Stillman's assistance, seated herself with the pillows behind her, and waited until Meade laid Darling's head in her lap.

Harold sighed. "That's good—" he murmured. For a time he closed his eyes and lay absolutely quiet. Only his breathing showed that he lived. Bernice sat brooding above him, her eyes on his face across which was stealing a shadowy pallor.

At last Darling opened his eyes again. "Biddy," he questioned, "Biddy—are you still there?"

"Yes," she whispered above him.

"Of course." His lips twitched as though he were trying to force them into the curve of pleasure. "I can feel you—but—I can't see you—I can't see you, Biddy—not any more—not ever." He began panting shortly, and then across the quiet of the room his voice came almost like a supplication: "Oh, Bernice—Bernice!"

Quite by impulse she struggled free from the weight of his head, swept his shoulders into her arms, raised him slightly and kissed him. It seemed to her that his lips sought feebly to return the pressure of her own. Then, without any other sign, they relaxed into a nerveless line.

With a strangled cry she dragged her mouth from that of a man who had died.

His eyes wet with tears beyond any power of controlling, Meade bent and gathered her into his arms. "A true gentleman," he said hoarsely. "May God receive his soul!"

CHAPTER XX.

What Belden Knew.

ON the day after Darling's death Meade again bade Bernice goodby, took the Stillman, now finished by Belden, and under orders from the president himself, proceeded west, leaving Arkel and Belden to repair the wounded Bernice. It was a mission fraught with no little danger, and Bernice saw him depart with a sickening heart.

At the same time it was deemed advisable to strike quickly in all parts of the country.

The remnants of Carton's army and the volunteer forces collected in the west at the beginning of the war, received orders to concentrate and entrain for immediate service across the Coast Range, so soon as the Stillman should be ready to clear the way before them.

The obsequies of Darling remained to Bernice, her father and the nation. His only relatives, who had fled from the ancestral home in Virginia, were now near Lexington, Kentucky. To them the body was sent on a funeral train.

For three days it lay in state under a guard of honor, its casket draped with purple, a canopy of flags above its head. A military cortège escorted it to the waiting train, which bore it southward.

And so Harold Darling passed.

Meanwhile Belden and Arkel worked steadily in the great shed, which housed the Bernice, and two more days saw the big craft again ready to go into commission. At Arkel's own petition, seconded by Gethelds, at his daughter's urging, Arkel was to be given her command.

He had gone to Bernice before making his request, and she understanding the sentiment which made him want to

fly the ship in which the man he loved had gone to his death, had thrown all her influence toward getting him what he wished.

On the night his commission issued he went down to the plant to look over the vast fabric, which had become something like an obsession to his mind, and seemed to call him when he was out of her sight.

He rather expected to find Belden still poking about the shed, as he was in the habit of doing, but was disappointed. He had meant to tell him that he was really to command the great destroyer, and take a fresh hand in the final crushing of the invading armies.

He was full of it, and he wanted to tell some one who would feel about it as he himself did. Not finding Belden in the shed or about the works, he bethought him that he sometimes worked in the laboratory until late at night, and leaving the shed after a final glance at the air-ship, he felt confirmed in his surmise when he found the laboratory windows alight.

Still intent on a talk and a smoke with the old engineer, he walked over, satisfied the guard at the foot of the stairs and went up.

With a feeling of surprise he found the door at the head of the stairs ajar. It was unlike Belden to leave it unlatched, at least. As he remembered, the few times he had been there, the door had always been caught by a spring lock, operated from the inside.

He set a hand to the door, and on second thought rapped.

There was no answer, and after a pause he pushed the door inward, stepped inside and looked about for Belden. For a moment he fancied the place was empty, and then he caught sight of the old man's figure stretched out on the floor, in front of an open safe.

Something in the posture of the body, turned half in its side, and half on its face, caused his heart to miss a beat, and then begin to race wildly. Without waiting to even push the door shut, he ran across and bent over the prostrate figure.

"Belden?" he spoke, and was not surprised when he gained no answer. He put down a hand and turned the man's face to the light.

It was pallid and sallow looking in the flare of the electrics, and across it, stretching downward from somewhere in the hair, was a smear of blood. He put down his hand to the engineer's heart, and found it beating faintly, with a rather slow rhythm; and, while he watched in shocked horror, Belden gasped with an upheave of his chest.

Arkel swept his eyes from the man at his feet and cast them about the room. He had not noticed it before, but the place was in utter disarray. Books and papers from the safe were scattered over the floor, a closet on the wall had been wrenched open and its contents pulled out and thrown about the floor beneath it.

A second little cupboard had had its doors torn open, and they swung wide before his inspection.

Drawers in various tables had been drawn out and not pushed back. Without doubt, the entire room had undergone a hurried search, and in that instant Arkel felt that he held the explanation of the man's condition.

Some one had come here to get something, Belden had resisted and the other had struck him down, either gained or failed of what he sought, and gone away, leaving the door as he had found it, off the lock.

He turned and ran back through the door, sprang down the stairs in leaps which cleared several steps at a stride and confronted the startled sentry below. "Who was the last man to enter or leave here?" he demanded.

"You was," declared the man.

"Before that, you fool?" snapped Arkel. "Do you think I don't know I'm here?"

"The last was Colonel Gotz, sir," said the soldier. "He come up with Mr. Belden, and he left about a half-hour ago."

"Colonel Gotz!" cried Arkel. "Oh, the devil! Say, you haven't been off post, or relieved for a while or anything, have you?"

"No, sir. I've been on post for two hours," averred the sentry.

"And you don't know that somebody's knocked Belden out and looted the place?" Arkel groaned. "Say—sound an alarm, will you, if you know how to do that."

The sentry raised his rifle and fired in the air. "Corporal of the guard! Post number nine!" he bawled.

A corporal and his guard of privates rushed from quarters and ran toward Arkel and the soldier, across the yard, beneath the sputtering arcs.

In a moment Arkel had explained briefly and dashed back up the stairs with the petit officer and a couple of privates at his heels.

A glance sufficed to show the truth of his statements, and the corporal spoke to his men: "Stay here, you, till I report and get in an ambulance call." He darted away, back down the stairs.

Fifteen minutes later an ambulance with clanging gong drove into the yard of the plant. Belden, still breathing in labored manner and unconscious, was carried down the stairs and placed under its hood. The laboratory was locked and a double guard posted at the top of the stairs by order of the Commandant of the guard at the works.

Arkel insisted that the entire guard about the shed of the Bernice be increased, and after being assured that it would be done, climbed aboard the ambulance and went with the old engineer.

A quick run brought them to the hospital doors. Belden was carried inside and put quickly to bed in a private room. While Arkel stood silently by, the hospital physician made a rapid examination of the injuries the old man had received. As he worked Arkel noticed that a frown grew upon his face.

Presently he rose from his inspection and turned around.

"There are evidences of a fracture of the skull," he remarked. "The man appears to have been struck a heavy blow on the right side of his face, and to have received the cut on his scalp, either from another blow with a dull cutting edge of some sort, or from a fall against something which had the same effect. It was undoubtedly the last injury which fractured his skull.

"His pupils are equal as yet, so we can't be sure if there is hemorrhage of any great extent or not, though his pulse seems to indicate that there may be. Still, in a man of his age, the injuries and the attendant shock may prove rapidly fatal. I can't say yet. Is he a relative of yours?"

"No," said Arkel; "just a friend. Will he recover consciousness at all?"

"Can't say as to that, either," replied the surgeon. "He may and he may not. You can't always tell. It's quite possible that he will. If it's important, I can try to bring him up."

"You'd better, then," decided Arkel. "If he can answer a question or two, and know what he's saying, it may be worth a lot to this country."

The physician's eyes narrowed. "So-o-o?" he said slowly. "Well—Suppose you wait down-stairs in the reception room. I'll see what can be done."

"I'll stick around," Arkel promised, and passed out of the room into a long, half-lighted hall.

He found his way below to the waiting room and sat down. He cast his eyes about. He felt strange and out of place—he, Arkel, now dressed in an unaccustomed uniform, which he had put on before seeking Belden to receive his congratulations.

Now Belden was up-stairs, unconscious, and he was waiting here, where so many had waited before him, waiting for the verdict from the quiet, low-toned tongues of the judges of life and death—as so many would wait after Belden and he were gone.

He shuffled his feet and rose and went over to a window. Presently he

bethought himself that he ought to telephone and tell Bernice. He remembered that she and the old engineer had been very friendly. It seemed that she ought to know.

He went out and across a hall to the office and asked for the use of a phone. The girl at the switchboard took his number and waved him to a soundproof booth. "Number two, booth, please," she directed. He stepped in and, a moment later, he heard the voice of Bernice.

He told her quickly what had happened, and he heard her gasp. "I think," came her voice, surcharged with excitement which he did not fully understand, "I think that I know what the people at the laboratory were after, Mr. Arkel. Mr. Belden once spoke to me about being afraid of something like this. I think—I think, that, maybe, I'd better come over. Dad is here, and he'll come with me. What would you advise?"

"I think you'd better, if you can make it," he told her.

"Then I will. Wait for me there." Her voice died.

Arkel hung up and went back to the waiting room and his introspection. In a way, Bernice's statement that she knew what the attack on Belden meant, had surprised him.

Not but that he suspected that some one had sought the plans of the destroyers and the secret of the radioactive plates, but that he wondered just how much the girl might really know, and if perhaps she would be able to furnish any clue to the identity of the thief.

That Colonel Gotz was in any way implicated he did not for a moment consider. He set the sentry's statement down to a lie told by the man to cover some dereliction of duty, as did also the Commandant of the guards at the plant.

Twenty minutes passed and a motor throbbed past the window. A moment later Bernice and Colonel Gethelds came into the room. Arkel rose and received them and offered them chairs. They sat down.

"Has he recovered consciousness yet?" said Bernice.

Arkel shook his head. "I guess not. The Doctor said he'd let me know."

Under Gethelds's questions he went on to tell all that he knew of the occurrence, which was meager, after all. At Gotz's name Gethelds frowned and fell into a consideration which held him for some time. They sat on.

Footsteps came down the hall to the door of the room and paused. The white clad form of the doctor filled the door. "He's coming up now," he announced. "You can go up, if you wish." He cast a glance at Gethelds and Bernice.

The colonel rose and made himself and daughter known.

"I think," said the doctor, "that perhaps this man who came with him had best go up first. You can come later, if the patient desires it. I must warn you that he is extremely weak."

Arkel rose and followed the surgeon back to Belden's room.

The old man lay motionless on his bed, but his eyes were open, with an intelligent light in their depths, and they turned directly to Arkel as he came in.

He crossed to the bed and stood looking down. "Do you know me, Mr. Belden?" he asked softly.

Belden blinked his lids. "He struck me—he struck me," he complained in a feeble voice.

"Who did? Tell me quick, Belden," Arkel felt himself on the verge of an important discovery.

"Wait," Belden muttered to himself and frowned. "Arkel, send for Miss Gethelds. I want to tell her all about it—something she ought to know. She'll understand."

"She's here, now. I told her and she came right over," said Arkel.

"You did right," mumbled Belden. "Have her right up."

Arkel turned to summon Bernice and the Colonel, but found the surgeon already departed on that mission. "The

Doctor will get her," he told the man on the bed and sat down on a chair.

The surgeon came back with the two from below, and they greeted Belden.

"Miss Bernice," said he, "I have a story I want to tell. It's a long story, and I want you to write it down. Can you get some paper?"

"I will," volunteered the doctor, whose interest was great. He departed again, on the quest.

Belden continued speaking. "Miss Bernice, I told you I was afraid somebody might try for the plans. You have them safe?"

"I wear them," said Bernice.

Belden smiled.

"You love Meade Stillman," he went on, "and it is only right that you should be the one to whom I tell this story, because I, too, love the boy, in my way. It was his trust and yours which saved him and made me strong at the last. Now I want to try and straighten out everything for you and him before I go away."

The surgeon came back with paper, pens and ink.

"If you could write shorthand," said Belden. "It's a rather long story. It covers twenty years."

"I can," declared the doctor. "I used it in taking notes at lectures in college."

"Then you write it down," directed Belden, "and I'll sign it at the end. Are you ready?"

The doctor nodded. He had drawn up a small medicine table near the bed, and now seated himself with his paper and pens.

"This is the voluntary statement of Herman Graf Belden," began the man on the bed; "given in the name of Justice, to free an innocent man from suspicion— Amen!

"I, Herman Graf Belden, an American of German descent, was in the year A.D. —— an employee of a man now, known as Jonathan C. Gotz, Member of Congress and principal owner of the Gotz Engineering Corporations. I was at that time, and have been since, a structural and mechanical engineer, and was working in the then small shops of Jonathan Gotz, who had married my sister Martha Belden, deceased, by whom he had one son, the present Colonel George Gotz of the aviation corps. Jonathan Gotz was also at that time deeply interested in local politics, and was an important member of the local machine.

"He was, however, a comparatively poor man. Shortly before this time a reform movement had put a number of new and untried men in office. Among them was one, a Howard Stillman, better known as a chemist and Professor of Science, who was elected to the office of City Treasurer."

Bernice Gethelds caught her breath. She remembered the story Meade had told her. "Was the truth about to come now, after twenty years?"

Belden heard her suppressed gasp, and smiled slightly before he picked up the thread of his narrative.

"As I have said, Gotz was hard up, and desired money for more extensive development of his shops. Also he was of the recently defeated party machine, which was very corrupt. Stillman was a man of probity, but small political or business experience.

"A plot was formed to discredit the new administration, and enrich certain men of the old.

"A clerk in the office of Stillman—an accountant, was taken into the plan. A certain amount of the City funds were stolen, and this clerk so juggled his accounts as to cover the deficit for the time. When the trap was ready to be sprung, a charge of defalcation against Stillman's office was filed, and a committee put on his books. The shortage was discovered.

"The clerk, well paid and protected by his accomplices, was announced as one of the chief witnesses for the prosecution. Stillman was unable to explain something of which he had had no previous inkling, and after a time he was indicted by a Grand Jury. The shock killed his wife, who was ill at the time, and he suddenly disappeared, taking his small son, now Meade Stillman, with him.

"He was sought in a nominal way, but was not found. His flight was accepted as a tacit confession, and the indictment still stands.

"But after the first excitement had subsided my sister Martha, Gotz's wife, came to me and told me that she had discovered positive proof—which, with a list of cor-

roborative names you will find in my rooms—that her husband, my brother-in-law, J. C. Gotz, had profited from the steal in the amount of twenty thousand dollars. I, of my own personal knowledge, knew that he had suddenly decided on extensive enlargements of the shops. My sister and I talked it over and decided to say nothing.

"Stillman had disappeared, my nephew, now Colonel Gotz, was a child, and the dislike of bringing odium upon him and his father seemed to offset any good which would be done by exposing the truth. In this my sister was of course influenced by her love of husband and child, and I as her brother could not bring myself to add to her grief by speaking.

"Therefore, I have lived in silence for twenty years, while a great injustice was done. This is, however, the truth of the theft of the funds and also of the source of the now large fortune of Jonathan C. Gotz. My sister had discovered the entire story of the plot and she told it to me.

"There is nothing more to tell, until quite recently. In the mean time I have continued to make my living as best I could. My sister died some years ago, and left me a little money on which, together with such wages as I received from such work as I could find, I have lived.

"When I received the appointment to assist Mr. Meade Stillman in making the lifting devices for the three aero-destroyers, Miracle, Bernice, and Stillman, my nephew, Colonel Gotz, hunted me up at my lodgings and suggested that, provided the ships proved a success, I should deliver the plans and directions for making the radio-active plates to him. He knew that Stillman had not yet protected himself by patents, and his father and he planned to take out all rights in their own names, in advance of such action by Stillman, and thus rob him of the fruits of his work, and lay the foundation for another fortune for themselves.

"I refused to consider his proposition, but he dogged my heels. At last I warned Meade to put his plans in a safe place, but he neglected to do it, under the press of getting the machines ready for service. Then I myself gave them to Miss Bernice Gethelds, and destroyed all other notes.

"To-night while I was in the laboratory at some work, my nephew, Col. George Gotz, came up and demanded the plans. I told him that I did not have them, and that they were not in the place. He grew at first abusive and accused me of lying, next he offered me a share in the profits, and finally he began to threaten, until I told him that he was at liberty to search the room for what he thought was there. He took me at my word, and ransacked the place while I watched him. I even opened the safe in order that he might look through its contents.

"When he was satisfied that I had told the truth he flew into a terrible rage, and demanded that I at least tell him from my own knowledge of the plans and formulas gained in my work. I told him it was useless to ask me to betray the trust which Stillman and Miss Gethelds had reposed in me.

"I went farther and told him that he should know how tightly my lips could be sealed, since it was I who for twenty years had shut them over the secret of his father's theft.

"At that his rage burst all bounds. He screamed out something about keeping them closed for all time, and leaped toward me where I was standing near the safe, and struck me. I lost my balance and fell, and I suppose, I struck my head against the door of the safe. That is all I remember until I found myself lying here.

"And this is my statement, to the truth of which I call Almighty God to witness, in the hopes that it may be the means of undoing the injustice of twenty years ago, and freeing any other man save my nephew, Colonel George Gotz, from any suspicion, in case I should die."

He paused for a moment and then spoke to the surgeon. "Have you got it all down, doctor?"

"Every word," said the medical man, and read it over.

"Let me sign it and have these others sign as witnesses, too," Belden requested. "Arkel, lift me up."

Arkel held him while he wrote his name at the bottom of the transcription the doctor held before him. Immediately after Bernice, Arkel, Gethelds and the surgeon added their signatures. Belden sighed.

"After twenty odd years I feel like a man again," he said softly. "A secret like that is a dreadful burden to carry, yet it has taken me months to nerve myself to speak, and I doubt if I would have done it, except for what happened to-night. Now I am glad that I have. Miss Bernice, I hope that when all this trouble is over, you and my boy Meade will be very happy. God bless you for a sweet woman, my dear. And now I think I will take a little nap."

Gethelds himself took charge of the written pages, and they left the room very softly, after saying a quiet good-by.

An hour later a nurse found the old engineer apparently sleeping. And the sleep that he slept was the one which has no waking in the flesh.

CHAPTER XXI.

The Supreme Miracle of All.

"WHEN you come home bring your father with you. His name has been cleared."

Such was the message Bernice sent to Stillman in the West. Her own father had assured her that there would be no question but what the charge against Meade's father would be quashed by due legal process.

Such assurance was made doubly sure by the action of Gotz, father and son. They fled the city in advance of those who went to serve warrants upon them on a number of charges, not the least of which was one of manslaughter against the Colonel. His flight increased the count, by adding that of desertion to the list.

Already the situation all over the country was beginning to straighten out.

In the East the army, with Monsel and the Miracle to assist, had regained most of the lost ground. Deprived of their fleet, whose terribly battered hulks either rode in ineffective ruins, or rested on the Chesapeake's floor, mute monuments to Arkel's berserk rage on the death of his commander, they surrendered with small resistance and were herded into concentration camps to await arrangements for their deportation.

Meade flying into the West with the Stillman, expecting to face the dreadful necessity of inflicting more slaughter, was most happily surprised.

From Canada to Europe, the news of the fate of the Atlantic forces had flashed by cable, and thence on around the globe to Hawaii, and from there by wireless between the units of the Oriental fleet to San Francisco. The effect was to shake the over-burgeoned confidence of the Japanese in possession of the Pacific Coast.

Before they could devise any effective defense against the new power of their opponents the Stillman itself hovered above the Bay and the City and cast down a demand for their immediate surrender upon the alternative of instant destruction if they refused.

By a sort of poetic justice they found themselves in the same position which had compelled the city's surrender to themselves some months before. They chose life and defeat to death.

The troop trains came down from the mountains, and advanced under the Stillman's protection. Sacramento was forced to surrender and was occupied. The surrounding country was freed from its recent garrisons by a few well directed shells, which gave ample demonstration, rather than caused loss of life.

Other trains loaded with fresh troops came down the valley to the Bay of Oakland, where Arkel in the Bernice, which he had brought on from Chicago, had been standing guard above the Japanese fleet, which had sailed into the Bay and landed its crews on Stillman's demand.

Meade came with the troop trains, and guarded the march of the Federal forces through the streets of the recaptured city of San Francisco. Afternoon found the stars and stripes again whipping from the staff on the Presidio parade.

Vast quantities of aerial bombs, both at Sacramento and the Presidio, and on board the vessels of war, were seized and destroyed. Crews were thrown on the vessels to hold them, and patrols moved about the streets of the city. Once more San Francisco was in American hands.

The yielding of the Japanese was, in a way, as spectacular as their cap-

ture of the city had been. Numbers of their officers committed hara-kiri at the time of the surrender, but beyond that there were no direct casualties attending the reoccupation.

For days and weeks the pacification of the State went on in a similar fashion. As fast as troops were sent in from over the mountains either Stillman or Arkel met them, and led them from point to point, guarded their occupation, hovered above them until the menace of their surroundings had grown within their own ability to control, and returned to repeat the performance.

Nowhere was any serious resistance met with.

A spirit of discouragement and fatalistic acceptance seemed to have fallen upon the Orientals. They seemed to realize their inability to cope with the well-nigh invisible things which rode the air above them. They were herded into central points until they could be sent back home.

Meanwhile the Federal Government had not been idle. With the aid of the British embassies, negotiations were opened with Tokyo, with a view to peace. Robbed of its navy, depleted of means for any rebuilding, or further prosecution of the war, the Mikado's government was not in a position to refuse.

A treaty was arranged in which Japan surrendered all claim to the Hawaiian and Philippine Islands, and agreed to order and compel the removal of all her subjects from the former group. In addition, she was asked for an indemnity in cash, which would strain her credit for years.

Resistance being useless, she accepted, and announced the she would send merchant vessels and transports to carry her captive armies from the Pacific ports to her shores.

Throughout the territory occupied by the Orientals, the American people were already returning to their abandoned homes. East, west and south the lines of travel became flooded with their advance, even as they had been thronged with their retreat. Already plans were forming for the rebuilding of destroyed cities on a greater, a finer scale than before.

A week from the final surrender of the Japanese in the East saw men walking amid the ruins of burned and fallen buildings, arranging for the sale and removal of débris.

In Washington itself the destruction was small. The Japanese occupation being unresisted, seemed to have been marked by little vandalism on buildings or other property. Possibly they intended preserving it for a governmental seat for themselves, should they succeed in making their occupation of the eastern part of the country permanent.

As a consequence the return of the Federal Government from Chicago amounted to little more than a reoccupation of its former quarters. Within the private homes and business houses looting had, of course, been general, but the city as a city was intact.

The middle of March found Bernice and her father back in the Connecticut Avenue home. She had had several messages from Meade, telling of his safety and the work Arkel and he were doing. They were together in the West still.

Monsel with the Miracle was stationed at Washington itself. The Captain had called upon her once or twice between cruises. In all save Meade's presence things were coming to almost a normal state in her life.

And Meade's presence was to come. There came a day toward the end of March when he left Arkel and the Bernice in charge, entered the Stillman and rose up and across the mountains and fled over deserts and other mountains to a land of red sandstone buttress and pinnacle and bastions, where the wind blew and whirled the red dust round and round.

And flying high above that place of desolation he swam above a small oasis, already touched by the promise

of spring, till it lay like a green gem stone in the palm of a brown and wrinkled hand.

Sinking down, he grounded the great air-ship before the door of a sandstone hut, climbed down from her side and went in search of his father. Their hands met in the grinding grasp of men who seek to conceal a gripping emotion. "It has been a long time, my boy," said the elder. "There has been no word, and I have waited and hoped. Tell me—what have you done?"

"All that I went to do," Meade told him. "Spring Water said you were asleep. You must have been or you would have surely seen me when I landed. The Stillman is outside. Come have a look at it, dad."

Howard Stillman found that he trembled. He laid a hand on the shoulder of his son. So the image of his dreams was just outside. He walked beside Meade and stood for a long time in silence, gazing at the mighty hull.

"Just as we pictured, my boy," he said at length. "And she's saved a nation. What is twenty years to that? Perhaps the God of battles sent me here to prepare."

"It is ended, father," said Meade, in a voice that broke at the finish. He showed him the message Bernice had sent. "You are going back with me," he declared gladly. "I've come to take you back to the world of men."

The hand which held the telegram trembled. Stillman raised his eyes from the sheet of yellow paper and looked at his son. "The world of men," he repeated slowly. "Meade, my son, I think I should like to go with you for a time."

So that it happened that in the dawn of a new day the Stillman rose from that oasis womb, where she and her sisters had had their conception in the brain of a man, long before the first beam of their mighty keels were laid, and swept her creator back to the outside world of men.

There was no reason why it should not be. No longer was there one to point a finger of false accusation, and the name of Stillman was a name revered by men.

And so it came that on a day when the early spring of a new year, a new era, was sending its call of new life across the renewed country, with its promise of new things, new hopes, new ambitions, and the regeneration of things past, the Stillman came back with the old man and the new—who had been made a new man, by the call of his land, and the soul of a woman, whom he loved.

A faint green was tipping the twigs of the trees and the sides of the hills, washing them in like the first brush strokes of the Master Artist on a fresh canvas, when Meade came down on Washington, and sought out the Connecticut Avenue home. The breath of the spring had crept into his blood, and sent it leaping—thrilled him with its promise of new beginnings, new life, new hope and ambition, as he went to find Bernice.

A soft night followed the day, with a full round moon, which flooded the sleeping city, and the rolling hills and the porch of a home, where a man and woman were sitting, the hand of the woman held fast by the man.

"And you won't go back any more, dear," she whispered. "You'll stay here with me, after this?"

"I hope so," said Stillman. "I think that I can. It's just about finished, sweetheart—all the sorrow, and struggle, and horror. I scarcely think they'll need me any more. The miracle as they call it just now is practically complete. I think that from now on it can be just you and me."

"It seems strange," Bernice began gently. "All the time you were growing up to your manhood in the desert, and I to womanhood here, and we never knew. And then you came, and we met, and we spoke, and after that we were never the same again. I can remember your face that first night

when you promised that you would come back if ever the country should call you or I."

Meade laughed softly.

"And there wasn't a minute after that when you didn't call me—in my heart at least. From that time I began to want to be a man like other men. You were so beautiful—so wonderful to me. I had never seen a creature like you. I used to quiver just thinking of you, dear.

"I think I felt something like those old chaps of medieval story who received a visitation from a being of a different world—a sort of miraculous vision of something supremely good, and beautiful, and pure. And that, Bernice, is how I hold you now, in the deepest chambers of my soul.

"You were my miraculous visitant, who came to lead me out of bondage into a fuller, a wider life; and set me free. Let others talk all they want about miracles, sweetheart. You are the one Supreme Miracle to me."

She leaned toward him, wide eyed, parted of lip, her breath sweet as the breath of the night and the spring. Her every line as full of ripened promise as the golden circle of the moon which flooded her face and glinted in her hair. "Boy of mine," she said in a voice half tears, half laughter; "the Supreme Miracle is Love."

(The end.)

GRIM FATE ON THE GROVER C.

A SHORT STORY

BY FORREST HALSEY

PANSY Brannan, ruler of canal society, woman of ambition, and boss of the Grover C. edged her tight hair out of the hold.

Inch by inch her sunburnt forehead followed. Then came a pair of heavy and knotted brows above eyes of deep suspicion.

Pansy was on the watch.

And yet what was there in the peaceful scene to cause a lady to leave a half-cooked dinner? Surely not the prone figure of Captain Bill, husband of the boss, who, hands clasped on red-flannel mid-curve and mouth open, snored on the blistering deck.

The days of crouching and peering for Pansy in her relationship with her husband were over.

Captain Bill, past the age of frisking about on the straight and narrow canal-path, now plodded steadily through life requiring little or no attention from his driver.

Of course there was talk of Captain Bill and the lady lock-keeper at Chipping Falls, but mainly on account of what Pansy had done to the lady lock-keeper. Besides, that had been years ago; and furthermore, Captain Bill had always insisted that the fault was none of his.

Since the captain would not have dared infer that the blame could be

Pansy's, the inference is up to the lady lock-keeper.

Pansy waited.

The brown tow-path checkered with sun and leaf shadows curled into the summer woods beside clear water gently rippled by the tow-rope. At the end of the rope a gray mule and a white horse somnolently plodded, beside them—ah, well, beside them was the reason for the boss's actions.

The reason was clad in blue overalls, shirt, and cap—a color indicative of innocence. The stains upon the costume suggested that, before he became a canal-boy, he had known labor.

The slim, husky young back showed to Pansy nothing but the utter detachment and mental oblivion of a canal-boy at work.

"And yet," said Pansy, "I'd 'a' swore I heard something."

But there was nothing to hear now except the murmur of the sun-slashed woods and the ripple in the grasses along the bank.

"Well," growled the boss, addressing the back, "all I can say is that I wisht Boonsville was behind instead of before, so as to be shut of you. The next time the captain picks up a tramp from the tow-path he's a gona hear from me."

Pansy's bulk began the undulations which proclaimed a return to her boat-keeping duties.

And then Fate spoke.

"Hey, Jimmy! Look back!" The voice of Jimmy's fate was clear—clear enough to reach the team, for the mule twitched an ear; but not loud enough to awaken a sleeping captain or disturb a mother, if that mother happened to be busy getting dinner.

The blue figure plodded on.

The mule was the only member of that group that seemed to take the call to himself.

Yet the expression of the boss's face made plain the fact that the call was not for the four-legged animal.

No mother's eyes gleam with rage, no mother's brow clouds with storm, when a daughter requests a mule to look back.

"Knowed it," the boss assured herself. "Now I'll get him. This is what comes of lettin' a hobo eat with us. The ungrateful shrimp! Sparkin' my daughter before my own eyes."

To any but a mother's eyes the shrimp would not have seemed the sparker. He plodded doggedly.

There was even a sullen repudiation of fate's command in the quick hunch of the blue shoulders, the sudden plunge of hands into pockets.

"Hey, Jimmy, stop. I want to speak to you."

"And her engaged to marry a barber," snorted the boss in amazement as she contrasted visible soiled overalls with remembered tonsorial splendor. "Of all the villains I ever see that hobo is the limit."

"Jimmy, please wait. It's something important, *really, really.*"

Jimmy waited. Fate, crouching in the hold, waited also.

The team plodded around a curve of the canal. The wet tow-rope dragged across the bank, leaving a snaky arabesque on the brown path.

As the boat passed him the villain turned to it a grim face on which sullenness, manly modesty, outraged seemliness, and the anger of the lower sex when it feels itself the sport of the upper, were displayed.

"You quit, Peg Brannan." The growl was deep. "*Quit* now, I tell you. Your ma told me about that barber at Little Falls. You quit trying to make a fool of me."

Jim's blush and helpless glower showed that further efforts in that direction were needless.

"Why, Jimmy!" The voice was charged with shocked surprise. "Ain't barbers respectable to know? I thought they was. You know they always dress fine and have steady jobs. I thought barbers were real fashionable. Ma says they are. She took an awful shine to Frank."

The hideous cruelty of this speech

with its many implications jerked two words from the victim:

"Damn barbers!"

"Oh!" The word came from the lips of Peg Brannan—Peg, the belle of the Erie Basin.

In all canal society which gathered there in winter there was none to touch Peg. The reason was plain as she leaned on the tiller of the Grover C., her pink sun-bonnet casting a rosy glow on smooth, round, sunburnt cheeks, and deepening to violet the blue provocation of her eyes.

Secure in feminine power, with the added safeguard of five feet of water between herself and the victim, she looked down upon his misery, laughed —and then blew him a kiss."

"I dare you to do that," said Peg of the Grover C.

"Gwan." Jim rammed his hands deeper into his overall pockets.

"You're afraid to. You're afraid of my father."

"Ain't."

"You're afraid of ma."

"Ain't."

"You wait," the boss muttered from ambush. "If you ain't you are gona be."

"You're afraid of me," said Peg sadly.

"I ain't," said Jim, which was a lie.

"Don't you like me, Jimmy?" Peg's eyes were blue mists of pain at the bare thought. A very sorrowful Peg except for the dimples dancing about the drooping lips.

"No, I don't," yelled the victim.

"Oh, Jimmy, why not?"

"Because I ain't a barber," vociferated the tortured one. "And even if he has a steady job, and if he has swell clothes, and if your ma does like him, I never seen a barber yet that was a man."

"You're not old enough to have seen much of barbers," explained Peg.

"That so?" with a sneer, but with cheeks that required a razor only once a week, hot.

"And barbers are such hard workers," reflected Peg.

This was a cruel thrust. Had not he told her that he, Jim, had a trade? Didn't she know that he could make three tires and six dollars and fifty cents any day that he was given a chance?

Was he responsible for the fact that the rubber company at Belleville had shut down? Wasn't he on his way to the factory at Boonsville?

Was a tire-maker, temporarily out of work, to have barbers thrust down his throat as if he were a common tramp? He'd see her far before he'd forgive her.

"Jimmy."

No answer. The best way to settle women like that was not to take any more notice of them than if they never had been born.

"Jim—I suppose you like that better. It does sound older."

Darn the women! Why couldn't they let a fellow alone? Funny thing that a girl would want to speak to a tramp.

Huh! Anybody'd know that a girl like that would think of nothing but marrying for money. He'd just show her that she couldn't make him speak to her.

"I forgot, Jim. You needn't throw me a kiss. We are awful near to Little Falls and somebody might see you and tell Frank. I wouldn't have Frank get after you for the world—poor Jimmy."

"Poor Jimmy!" He halted with a jerk. "You wouldn't have Frank—somebody might see—" Words failed him.

But not muscles.

With a jump he had cleared the intervening water. A single heave and he had boarded the boat. Two seconds later she was in his arms and he had kissed her.

"There," cried the furious man, "tell him yourself."

"How dared you!" cried the furious lady.

Then she slapped his face.

"You wait," shouted the boss. "You're paw will fix that hobo."

In Jim's appalled vision the mighty figure of the boss rose from the hold like the spirit of vengeance out of a bottle.

With eyes of dazed surprise the two at the tiller saw her waddle to the side of the sleeping captain, heard her vociferate into a globular ear:

"Get up! That tramp is kissing your daughter."

"That's all right—that's all right, Pan," soothed the voice of the captain, the only part of him awake.

"Get up! I tell you that hobo is kissin' Peg!"

Dragged to a sitting posture, the captain opened his eyes and scratched his head. The captain's face had been helped by nature to a double portion of good humor.

Peace at any price with women was the captain's charted course in life. The result was that he was not often allowed to sail that course.

The boss drew him after her toward the stern where Peg, in a carmine fury, confronted Jim, on whose jaw the pink marks of fingers had been obliterated by a flood of the scarlet of detected guilt.

"You fresh gink," said Peg through small teeth clenched in vicious satisfaction. "You got me in bad, and I suppose you are tickled to death. But you just wait."

That he was in bad himself Jim was miserably aware as the boss, holding her husband with one fist, shook the other under his nose.

"No wonder you ain't able to look a decent woman in the face," shouted the boss.

It was quite true. Far from being able to look a decent woman in the face, Jim wanted to hide from the whole sex.

A statue of helplessness he stood while the boss proceeded:

"There he is, there's the low down hobo that has et the victuls I cooked for him, and the minute my back was turned went to kissin' my daughter."

Peg nodded her head briskly. Her expression indicated that the betrayal of the Brannan family was too despicable for words.

"I've saw through you from the first," cried the boss, while the youth, eyes sullenly lowered to avoid the withering glance of a mother's scorn, smoothed the toe of one shoe with the sole of the other.

"I've saw right through you, me buck, with your runnin' to the wells to git water for her, an' tryin' to win the heart of a trustin' girl by peelin' potatoes."

"She made me peel 'em," growled the unchivalrous youth.

The boss whirled on the captain.

"I ast you, Bill Brannan, are you goin' to stand there and hear that tramp insult your wife and daughter?"

The captain did not want to stand there and hear his wife and daughter insulted. If his wife would have let him he would have gone somewhere else and smoked a pipe until the row was over.

Long experience had convinced the captain that women folks were quite able to look out for themselves and any man who came around.

The crowning insult of a life of bondage had been the barber of Little Falls. Easier could a camel go through the eye of a needle than a barber into the affections of the captain of the Grover C.

A sneaking hope had lifted a head in his soul, a hope that fate would save him from a son-in-law who would make him shave.

"You hadn't ought to done it, Jim," said the captain, shifting two hundred pounds of embarrassment from foot to foot.

He looked at his daughter pleadingly. Jim's abject figure should touch a girl's heart.

"He hopped right off the bank and kissed me," said Peg, vehemently refusing to be touched.

The captain sighed. Evidently Peg did prefer the barber. Hope was dead.

"An' you stand there an' hear that, an' not give him a whalin'! Are you or ain't you a man, Willum Brannan?" demanded the boss.

"Aw, Pan!" protested the Captain three-quarters for himself and a sneaking quarter for Jim.

"Oh, no, you wouldn't do nothin'," remarked the boss with biting irony. "No, not you. Not even if he was to jump offen the tow-path an' kiss me."

"Aw, Mrs. Brannan," begged Jim.

"Aw, Mrs. Brannan!" The boss fronted him, arms on hips. "Aw, Mrs. Brannan! Go on, call me out of my name. Kiss my daughter. Do anything you want to. You know there is nobody here to stop you. You know me an' Peg ain't got nobody to pertect us. Oh, you villain, you! I told Bill when he took you offen the tow-path I never see a worser face on two legs."

"Lemme off this boat," said the villain abjectly.

"Yes, let him off the boat. Nobody goin' to stop him. Nobody here is goin' to fight to pertect their wife an' daughter."

"What you want me to do, Pan?" asked the Captain uncertainly.

"I want you, if you got a spark of manhood in you, if you got any feelin's that call on you to protect your peaceful home; I want you, if you got any of them things, to lick the imperdent tramp who has been insultin' your wife an' daughter. If you ain't I don't want you to, but if you don't I don't never want you to hold up your head around me again."

"Let him go, ma." Peg did not refer to her father. "I'm sure nobody wants to keep him." The pink sunbonnet tossed in infinite scorn.

Jim glanced over his shoulder. Eight feet of clear water lay between him and safety. He hesitated.

And while he hesitated the cowed and frightened captain, cravenly deserting his sex, hit him a buffet on the ear.

"Oh, don't!" cried Peg.

Jim crouched and covered his head.

"Quit," he protested. "Quit, Brannan, I ain't lookin' for trouble with you."

But the captain did not quit. From the bay to the mountains the weight of his fist was known. At the first feel of flesh under his knuckles he became a war captain. He slugged again.

"I'll teach you to go sparkin' my daughter," yelled the captain.

"Quit, Brannan. Quit now, I tell you," growled the other, dodging and ducking. A blow reached full on his ear and seared it as if with a hot iron.

"You quit, damn it," snarled Jim.

"Quit, paw—stop!" Peg clutched at her parent's driving arm. "Oh, Jim, jump!"

"Yes, jump, you coward," cried the boss, clapping her hands. "Run away."

"I will like—"

Jim supplied the necessary word, and forthwith around the deck of the Grover C. thrashed a whirl of fight that was Homeric.

The planks resounded to the stamp of heavy boots, through the peaceful summer woods, and over the quiet water went the thuds of blows.

Round the fight circled the screaming women, clutching at heavy arms which shot from their grasp and encircling muscular waists that twisted from their restraint.

In distant fields farmers halted plows to listen and wonder.

The captain was mighty, but short of breath. Jim was lithe and young. Among the tire-makers he had been known to wear down many a man of fifty pounds heavier behind the high board fence of the works on a Saturday noon.

The captain's blows grew lighter, his breathing heavier, his rage more furious. Finally he stood still thrashing the air and bellowing. And then Jim sent him sprawling.

Panting and sweating, standing astride his prone foe, Jim thrust out his neck and jutted his jaw at Peg.

"You tell your barber that you seen a *man* fight."

"You—you great big coward, to hit an' old man!"

Strange are the ways of women. But a few minutes before Peg had been screaming to her father to spare one so much weaker than himself.

"I ain't goin' to stand an' let any man beat me up. Watcher think I am?" demanded Jim.

Then he reeled from a strenuous slap in the face. His hair was seized and his amazed head dragged back and forth.

"I'll larn you to beat up the man that's took you up and fed you an' been a father to you. Take that an' that an' that for yours," cried the boss.

Each "that" was a stinging slap.

"Hey!" cried Jim. "Look out—Mis' Brannan—oh, Mis' Brannan—"

And then, cheeks and ears stinging with pain, he tore from her clutch and dived into the friendly water.

To the bank he crawled and stood dripping, blinking the drops from his eyes.

The ripples of the vanished boat murmured in the grasses at his feet, a mournful murmur as if the gods of the water communed sadly on the ways of women. A jay streaked with a flash of blue the gold and green of the woods.

"Well, one thing is sure," said Jim sadly, "I certainly am in bad for good with the Grover C."

Stripping off his soaked clothes he spread them to dry in the sun and crouched in the grass, arms clasped about legs, chin on knees, to consider a black world.

To the little gods of quiet waters, who are pagans, the white figure in the hot sun must have suggested memories of Greece and youth in melancholy.

It was rotten. He had beaten up the captain, the captain who had given him work when he had found him footsore and hungry on the canal-bank. He liked the captain.

And—gosh darn it, she never told him about the barber. She had had plenty of chances when they had sat on the edge of the boat, the water whispering below them and the moon like the half of a clean, white tire in the sky.

He had told her he wasn't a tramp, that he made six dollars a day. Gee! she certainly had done him dirt.

The barber was welcome to her. Oh, yes, Jim didn't envy him. He had too much respect for himself, had Jim, to let a girl like that worry him for one minute. Oh, yes, indeed.

"Hey, bo!" said a voice behind him.

Jim turned his head to behold a youth with a bag of clubs, evidently a caddie on his way to work.

"What?"

"You can't swim here."

"Who's going to stop me?"

"The cops. The Ladies' Wanderlust Club of Little Falls has been raisinell since they took their last walk. If you want to swim, go up a couple of miles till you get to a windmill on a hill. That's the county line. Beyond that the cops can't touch you."

"You say this is Little Falls?"

"Yep. Town's only a little way from the next bridge."

"I gotta dry my clothes. If any ladies comes wanderlusting along I'll duck into the woods."

"Howjer get your clothes wet? An' your face is cut. Been in a fight, ain't yuh?"

"Naw! Went to church and fell over a pew. That satisfy you?"

"You got a merry disposition. Who are you?"

"I'm the gink that put the beat in 'beat it.'"

The caddie went on.

"When I get my clothes dried I'll sneak into town an' see if I can chop some wood for some eats. Gee! I hate this hobo gag," said Jim.

When his clothes dried he dressed.

"Wouldn't it be sad if I should run across that swell barber?" he reflected as he tightened his belt.

While Jim was searching Little Falls for a dinner that meal was progressing aboard the Grover C. An air of sullen outrage brooded in the cabin. For the sixth time the captain paused, potato in hand, and spake thus:

"Didn't he jump into the canal when he seed me gettin' up after my foot slipped an' I fell accidental?"

"He sure did. He's the worst coward I ever see," stated the boss. "The tramp."

"He ain't!" Peg rose in blazing anger to her feet. "An' you've no right to abuse him the way you do. He ain't a tramp. He's—he's—"

But what he was she failed to say. The tears choked her and she rushed on deck.

The captain laid down the potato and gaped at the boss.

"What is the matter with her?" he demanded furiously.

The boss folded her arms and smiled.

"Bill Brannan," said the boss, "you done the best day's work of your life when you run off that kid."

"If"—the captain grew purple—"if I thought that she would go back on her father for a hobo I'd take her by the back of the neck an' I'd—"

"Oh, hush. You got us all in trouble enough for one day, an' it's up to you to remember it an' keep quiet," with which unjust remark the boss rose and began to wash the dishes.

Breathing in heavy gusts, the captain went out to work.

"Got them in trouble enough fer one day," he growled as he removed the nose-bags from the team. "Got them in trouble enough fer one day. Ain't that like a woman, Buddy?"

Buddy wagged one long ear in silent assent.

"If I could just git aholt of that kid once, *once* with good footing so I wouldn't slip, I'd whale the life outer him."

Buddy and Jake moved on, superior to men and their vanity.

They moved for several miles until they came to the dock of the Coaticoake Coal Company, where a half-dozen canal-boats were moored.

The arrival of the Grover C. was greeted by shouts from male and female figures on the decks. Presently arrived the boss of the Thomas J. Hendricks to inform the boss of the Grover C. that a dance would be given upon the Thomas J. that evening to such of canal society as was reachable.

The boss of the Grover C. accepted for her party. She informed the boss of the Thomas J. that it would include Mr. Frank Pollack, to whom she was about to send word of their arrival at Little Falls.

Canal society is exclusive. But as the stranger was about to marry into the aquatic set, the boss of the Thomas J. cordially included him.

In the Frank Pollack Tonsorial Parlors, the owner, white of coat, black of eyes and hair, calm, clean, and up to date as his electrical massage, was pinching a newly shaven face between finger and thumb and commenting on the closing of the tire-factory at Boonsville.

"Times is fierce," said Mr. Pollack. "Far as I can see, the new administration ain't done nothin' to reduce the cost of livin'. Take shavin' soap, fer instance. Not a cent has it fell.

"Your hair is awful dusty, Jake. Better get your sportin' clothes on and have a electrical shampoo."

The arrival of a boy with the boss's message permitted Jake to escape.

At eight o'clock that Saturday night Mr. Frank Pollack, leaving a shop full of customers, an enraged assistant, and disseminating various perfumes of powerful nose power, betook himself toward the Grover C.

Had Peg's home been stationary, no doubt the barber's love would have been transient. But the youth whose beloved's abode is towed into his vicinity on Saturdays and away on Mon-

days has little chance of satiety in his *fiancée's* society.

Still, there were moments when the barber was sure he was making a mistake in marrying beneath him. But those moments were not the ones when the Grover C. was tied up at the coal company's dock.

As Mr. Pollack entered the company's gate the strains of a fiddle greeted his ears, and he perceived the Thomas J.'s deck to be illuminated by lanterns and the Thomas J.'s planks to be shaking beneath a dance.

"Well, what do you think of that?" demanded the barber, as he watched the decorously whirling figures. "These rubes ain't hep to the new steps."

He mounted the side of the Grover C. and was welcomed by Pansy Brannan with more than her usual cordiality. Her husband, for the first time in the barber's recollection, showed evident pleasure in his greeting.

Not that the barber cared for the captain's opinion. There can be no really deep affinity between a barber and one who only needs scissors.

"Go right into the cabin, Frank. Peg is waiting for you," beamed the boss.

The captain watched the neatly pressed figure trip away.

"I always did like that young fellow," he growled. "Pan, I'm a goin' to sand down this deck the first thing in the mornin'. It's that slippery a man risks his life every time he steps onto it."

The boss, hearing the murmur of voices in the cabin, gave a sigh of relief and wrapped her head in a fascinator.

"It's all right," she said. "I knowed that once Peg could git a sight of him it would fix her. She gets her fickle disposition from you. Where are you going?"

The captain who had one foot on the dock took it off.

"I was just thinkin' of runnin' to town to get a little hair trim and then come over to the dance," he said quickly.

"You are goin' to town to look for that tramp and fight it out," said the boss sternly. "Doggone if men ain't too worritin'. Why can't they live in peace with each other?"

"If I could meet that whelp just once more, with firm standin' under me—" said the captain wistfully.

"Forget it," directed the boss. "Come with me. Frank will bring Peg."

The sight of a brown barrel rolled aboard the Thomas J. caused the captain to escort his wife hurriedly to the festive scene.

In the cabin Peg and the barber were in each other's arms. While the attitude was intimate the conversation was lacking in warmth.

"See?" said the barber. "One two—one two—now you bend your knee—down, git way down—that's it. One—two—that's it—now you're gettin' hep. Everybody's dancin' it. Tread on the ball of your foot. Don't raise on your toes—one—two—one—two."

Peg obediently swayed and dipped. There was something ominous in her docility. Ever since her outbreak at dinner she had not spoken, filling the Grover C. with a silence strike, which, under other circumstances, would have appalled the captain.

But the captain's sullen rage, the gleam in his eye when she had tossed her head at an aspersion on the absent tramp, had warned her that her father was not in his usual state of meekness. She had greeted the barber quietly.

The splendors of the barber, no matter how much they might fade during the week, were simply not to be resisted when they burst of a Saturday upon the Grover C.

Like many another girl who marries for ambition's sake, Peg found that day dreams have a craven habit of seeming pretty small when confronted with dazzling realities.

"Come on," said the barber finally, "let's go and open their eyes."

Upon the Thomas J. sober enjoyment circled slowly in time to a fiddle from the Teddy R. If, for reasons of youth or the brown barrel, a gentleman felt the pace too slow for his feet, he drew his arm from his partner's waist and performed a solitary clog or breakdown. When exhausted he again gathered to him his lady and, animal spirits relieved, continued the dance.

About the brown keg the chaperons and their husbands would nod approval of his efforts.

Occasionally one of the elderly captains would do a step or two himself, just to prove that it was still in him. The whole scene was laden with the decorum which distinguishes circus and canal society.

To this entered the barber.

The captain of the Grover C. had his back to the dancers and was deep in earnest assertion to the captain of the Lizzi I. Parker.

"An'," said the captain of the Grover C. violently, "before I could get up, after I'd slipped, durned if he didn't jump clear into the canal. But for Pansy an' Peg holtin' me I'd a gone in after him—

"What's the matter with you? Don't you believe me? What you lookin' like that for? Say, let me tell you, Mike Dunn, that I ain't afraid to prove what I say on your face."

Mr. Donavan's face held a stupendous incredulity. From their sockets his eyes emerged like eggs.

"Bill," he gasped, clutching his old friend, "take a look behind you."

The captain whirled, fists doubled. His mind leaped to the conclusion that Jim had dared to return. And then—

In the center of the halted dancers, gracefully swaying and dipping, the captain beheld his daughter and the barber.

All over this free country parents behold with satisfaction just such sights. Not the slightest objection would have been raised in any drawing room to what the captain saw.

But canal society is conservative, it lives to its self. Never, except on the stage of Walders, at Newark, had the captain seen the tango. Progress had come to the canal.

For a moment he was dazed. From life-long habit he looked at Pansy.

He had never seen such an expression on her face since the days of the lady lock keeper.

He looked at the barber, the unspeakable perfumed barber.

A smile of complete satisfaction, the last that was to cross his visage for some time, spread over the barber's face.

"Thought we'd wake 'em up," said the barber.

Peg tossed her head and bent for a particularly deep dip. Rebellion against her parent was in full possession of Peg.

And then the captain was in possession of the barber.

The barber was on the floor, the barber was in the air, the barber was in the water in half the time it would have taken him to scrape a chin.

The minute the howl ended in the splash the parent turned to his daughter.

"That's two-to-day," said the captain grimly. "Doggone me, this comes of lettin' your mother run things. From now on I'm the boss.

"And you needn't cry, neither of you. I mean it. I'll lick every man in creation, but I'll make you behave, Peg Brannan. Both of you come home."

With stern determination he led his women from the boat.

As they reached the dock a draggled figure crawled from the water and skulked to the gate, there it paused.

"I'll fix you for this—see if I don't, you old rube," yelled the barber.

The captain turned.

There was a sound of running feet. The yard was empty of the barber.

The crestfallen boss followed her husband meekly. Only once did she speak, and that was when she whispered to Peg.

"You done it on purpose. I seen it

in your face. What's the matter with you, anyway? You'll never get married if you make your paw throw every man overboard."

"I don't want to get married," said Peg venomously. "I just hate men."

Her mother began to sob. He had been such a beautiful barber.

Gloom brooded over the Grover C. Peg was in her cubby. The captain, in his home costume of shirtsleeves, with his socks over the rungs of his chair, confronted his perturbed wife.

"This all comes of your raisin'," he said bitterly. "The first thing you know we'll be disgraced."

A heavy hand knocked at the door, which then was opened by a blue arm on which shown the brass buttons of the law.

"You William Brannan?" said a voice of authority.

The captain nodded.

"Then I arrest you for assaulting Frank Pollack. Come along with me."

And in bitter rage the captain had to go, leaving his wailing wife and sobbing daughter to mourn.

Just about this time, in the town of Little Falls, the snarling and tired assistant of the Frank J. Pollack tonsorial parlors was aware of a young man in blue overalls in the doorway.

The assistant conceived the idea that this unfeeling person wanted a shave. Turning his neat head, he cast over his shoulder the remark:

"Get out. We don't shave tramps here."

It certainly was a night of peril for barbers.

The result of the remark was two broken shaving mugs, one bottle of egg shampoo which would never fulfil its mission in life, two overturned cuspidors, and one flattened barber's assistant, shrieking loudly for help.

"Now, Frank," said the gentleman in blue overalls who sat upon the prostrate form, "tell Miss Brannan, when you are able to see her, that I sent her them black eyes with my compliments."

"My name ain't Frank," wailed the owner of the presents for Miss Brannan. "You crazy gink, Frank's down on the Grover C."

The next minute the assistant was sitting among the débris of the fight and yelling for the police.

In a quiet side street, its lighted windows speaking of a sober village Saturday night, the gentleman in blue overalls slowed down to a hurried walk.

"I gota get outa this dump before some trouble happens," thought the gentleman of the overalls.

Then he came to a halt.

Half a block away a light shown on the blue and brass of an officer of the law.

The gentleman in overalls dodged into an open gate and crouched behind a rose bush.

The heavy tread of the law drew nearer, accompanied by a shuffling of another pair of boots.

Before the rose bush the feet halted.

"I tell you," roared an exasperated voice, "I ain't goin' to be locked up all night with no tramps. I'm a responsible party and the captain of the Grover C., and you take me to the justice of the peace or I won't go another step."

The gentleman behind the rose bush gave a start of astonishment.

"Hully gee!" said the gentleman.

"Awh! cut the beef an' come on," said the voice of the law.

There followed sounds as of a heavy person being pushed vigorously, then the sound of a fat elbow butting a hard stomach.

"You would, eh? Then take that," snarled the voice of the law.

The "that" was evidently the blow of a night-stick upon a stubborn skull.

The sidewalk resounded with concussion as of a weighty body sitting down with involuntary suddenness and force. Evidently captain Bill had slipped again.

"I guess that'll learn you," said the officer's voice.

Through the rose bush and over the fence there shot a figure in blue overalls. The night-stick was torn from a

palsied grasp and brought down on its owner's astonished head.

"I guess that'll learn *you*," said the gentleman in blue overalls.

Captain Bill, with a large bump growing on the outside of his head and dazed astonishment growing inside it, felt himself dragged to his feet.

"Come on and beat it. He's only stunned," said his rescuer.

Captain Bill, subdued by the bump into a condition to take orders, lumbered in bewildered obedience beside the young man.

The street was dark. It was not until they came to the light hanging above the gate of the coal company's dock that the captain recognized his rescuer.

All the abuse and outrage of the day of defeat surged in the captain's bosom.

"Why, durn me if it ain't you," yelled the master of the Grover C. "Come on. This time there ain't no canal to jump into." He threw off his coat and doubled up his fists.

"Oh, can it!" exclaimed the youth in bitter exasperation. "Do you want the cops to pinch us while we are fightin' each other? I never did see such a tryin' old party.

"Here." He thrust the coat into the captain's arms. "Shut your face. That will be about all from you. In you go," and grabbing the captain, he rushed him toward his aquatic home.

In the cabin the boss heard the noise and sprang to her feet.

"That's your father!" she cried.

Followed by Peg, she rushed to the deck, to behold her mate being propelled across the dock in the grasp of a figure in overalls.

"The villain has been beatin' your father up," screamed the boss. "He has gave him a lump like an egg on the side of his head. Let me get at him."

"Jim, what are you doing to father?" cried Peg.

"Nothin'," snarled Jim. "Don't you touch me, Mrs. Brannan. I didn't give him that lump. The cop who did it is coming after him hot-foot. Take him and keep him quiet."

"Oh, I knowed I oughter took him to jail myself," wailed the boss. "Now what are we going to do?"

"Get out of this," snapped Jim, and bolted for some sheds.

"He's runnin' away again." Captain Bill struggled in the arms of his wife. "Lemme git him, I say."

"Shut your face, Bill Brannan. It's a lucky thing we got somebody but a fool to look out for us this night. You come and lemme look at that lump."

"But—" the captain exclaimed as Jim emerged from the sheds, dragging the team after him.

"Shut up. Ain't you made trouble enough for one day?"

Words choked in the captain. Speechless he was dragged from deck.

Jim, as he hooked the tow, was assisted by two small sunbrowned hands.

"Oh, Jimmy," said a contrite voice absolutely foreign to the reliant Peg of the Grover C.

"You needn't think I have forgot one of them things you called me," retorted the youth darkly as he finished his labors. Turning his back on her he delivered a vicious stroke at the team.

The Grover C., lightened of its cargo during the afternoon, began to move nimbly through the water, leaving behind it the marks of the swiftest wake the aged and respectable boat had ever made. At the heels of the outraged team ran Jim, his arm going steadily.

At Jim's heels ran Peg.

"Oh, Jimmy, I'm so sorry."

No sounds but the necessary ones of the flight.

"Jimmy, ain't you goin' to speak to me?"

No answer.

"Jimmy—I never did really like that barber. It was—just his fascination."

A furious blow at the mule.

"I mean—just—just that his clothes and his ways sorter took me off my feet. I never did mean to marry him after I saw you."

"You can't con me no more." The running unfair one threw the remark to the pursuing fair one.

"You showed your real nature once for all when you called me a tramp. And I told you I was a tire-maker."

"I never called you such a thing!"

"Which same is a lie, Peg Brannan."

"I never said—" But denials stopped abruptly at sounds carried down the still water from the coal yard.

"They're coming after us! They'll catch us," she cried, and to meet the new emergency, clutched the youth's arm and brought him to a halt.

"Come along." He clutched her in turn. "Have I got to drag both you and the mule?"

"But Jimmy!"

"Oh, shut up. I know what I am doing."

Peg shut up. The fugitives ran through the moonlight. The shouts of the pursuers drew nearer. It seemed the height of absurdity to try to escape from the swift feet of the law with a canal boat.

The figures of the captain and the boss appeared on the deck of the Grover C.

"They're coming after us—they're going to git us! They're sure to git us," was the boss's logical information screamed into the night.

They certainly were. A moment later running figures rounded the bend of the tow-path.

"Hurry, Jim," cried Peg.

But apparently realizing the futility of the advice, Jim halted the team and waited.

The pursuers came exultingly down upon them. An old man with a star and white whiskers in the lead. Well in the rear was a barber's assistant adorned with an expression of triumph and a black eye.

"There's the gink that clumb the fence an' knocked me out," shouted the policeman.

"And he's the one that come in an' wrecked the shop," added the barber's assistant.

"An' there's the old guy, too," the officer pointed to the captain.

"We got both of them, sheriff."

"Yep," the sheriff advanced and put his hand on Jim's shoulder.

"You're arrested for assault and battery, malicious mischief, and resisting an officer in the performance of his duty."

Peg wrung her hands.

"You take him while I get the other," said the sheriff to the policeman who had suffered at Jim's hands.

"You bet," the officer grinned as he gripped his night-stick.

"Come ashore, Bill Brannan," called the sheriff. "You see I got force enough with me, so don't you go resisting the law."

"Just wait." It was Jim who spoke. "Don't you go breakin' the law yourself, sheriff."

"What's that?"

"Nothin', only see that windmill behind us? It marks the county line. Your authority don't go here.

"You are sheriff of Essex County, ain't you? Well, who elected you sheriff of Union? Guess we neither of us gits arrested to-night."

"Well, durn me." The sheriff looked at the windmill. "Well daggone me if it ain't so. But"—he raised his arm and pointed at the Captain of the Grover C.—"I'll git you the first minute you sail over the line, Bill Brannan, an' this kid with you."

"Let's git 'em, anyway," said the gentleman with the night-stick.

"No, we ain't got no authority." And sad but firm was the sheriff. "There's nothin' Union would like better than to git after Essex. But we'll git them next Saturday."

"You will, will you!" cried the captain. "I gess the Grover C. ain't tied down to no Morris canal. I gess she can get all she wants to do on the Erie. And before you go, Dan Sawgerty, you might gimme the dollar you borrowed three weeks ago in Russbower's Sample Room."

"I ain't got no time to talk to characters like you," and the sheriff turned his back.

The baffled forces of the law retired.

The water and woods returned to sylvan peace.

"Jimmy," said Peg.

He turned his back on her.

"Mrs. Brannan," he called, "tell Captain Bill to come ashore and tend to the team."

"What for?" demanded the boss.

"Because here I *quit*. You can stable in Hackensack."

"What you got again the Grover C., Jimmy Sullivan?" demanded the boss, looking down on him sternly from the deck.

"*What!*" His jaw dropped. He stood speechless.

"An' let me tell you there ain't no use your thinkin' of goin' to Boonsville. I got it straight, the Hardy works has shut down."

"I know it. But since now I'm a tramp for fair, I won't be intrudin' on you, Mrs. Brannan," sarcastically.

"Go on, a boy with your sense to act like that about what an old fool like Captain Bill says when he's mad. You'd oughter be ashamed of yourself, Jimmy, after all we done for you."

"That's right," bellowed the captain, "and, say, Jim, you don't hold my lickin' you up against me, do you? A man ain't responsible for what he does when people begin to crack him over the head. Come along with the Grover C., there are tire factories on the Erie, and if there ain't, the Grover C. is as good a berth as any goin' until hard times is over."

"That's all right," said the dazed Jim, "but where's the barber?"

"I throwed him into the canal," explained the captain.

"Git up, mule," said Jim.

"Don't wait up for me, ma—I ain't comin' aboard just yet," called Peg of the Grover C.

STILL WATER

A SHORT STORY

BY HAROLD TITUS

MILLIE waited on the six tables which were placed along the wall to the right as you entered the Washington Café.

She was the bright spot in all that big, ordinary establishment, the one flash of unusual in a murk of the commonplace.

All men looked twice at Millie; having looked the second time it became the natural thing to do.

They could not help but know that her face was crudely artificial, but such is the age-old way; when they spoke to her the answers came in outrageous grammar and the ideas conveyed were, like the diction, decidedly colloquial; she gave few outward indications of sound intelligence.

But her bearing conveyed somehow an impression of native wisdom that was sufficiently strong to override ordinary prejudice that might arise from looking on her empty, babyish face and listening to her puerile prattle.

Besides, Millie had hands that attracted in spite of their red. She had arms—sensuous, olive, firm looking arms. Her shoulders set squarely with a hint of independence and her figure was trim.

More: her waists were always filmy of sleeve and suggestively low on the shoulders—filmy enough to show the tempting biceps, low enough to display the beginning of that well defined graceful depression between her shoulder blades.

Her skirts hung snugly over the lithe hips and her shoes were always in repair. All of which, other things considered, evidences an innate knowledge of masculine psychology.

Millie's tables were always popular. To the man who sat there for the first time they offered merely the mild attractions of Millie passing back and forth—while he ate.

The newcomer did not catch the particular significance of that section of the café until the meal's end.

As he finished his dessert Millie made out the check, writing swiftly and irregularly, spelling badly, adding carefully. Then, if he paid her no attention, Millie said:

"What meat did you have?"

He told her, looked up and quite naturally reached for the slip of paper extended between her tapering fingers. It fell into his palm and the girl's warm clasp closed for the barest instant over his hand.

The thrill of a strange woman's touch!

Is there anything that will set the normal man's heart pounding quicker? Shame, delight, triumph—any or a combination may shoot the blood to his skin in a quick flush, for men are all human, and the thrill is merely warped by the condition of the individual.

And Millie avoided the chance of disaster in guise of an anti climax by hurrying away, a memory left behind of a studied, shy smile flashing from her too red lips, and temptation in the sway of her firm shoulders!

The next noon or night the stranger was back. (Oh, of course, not always.) Millie greeted him with a smile that time, and with it a muttered word.

Nothing in those first words themselves, nothing of consequence, some times nothing articulate. But the secret! The covered confidence, the nearness, the warm relationship that such communication engendered!

And after the newcomer at her tables had become something in the nature of a fixture, Millie whispered:

"Seen anybody you love better 'n me?" with a coquettish tilt of her head and a smile which seemed diffident yet venturesome as she flooded the cracked ice with water.

And the stranger invariably answered in the negative. By that time, too, he was reaching up for the check after his meal.

Unnecessary, for he laid it on the table beside his plate; but the action of taking it from slim, warm fingers that caressed his! It meant worlds!

And then he commenced to ask her questions, personal questions. Soon came the one about her spare hours, which Millie, behind her smile, considered with grim cynicism, for fourteen out of twenty-four on duty is answer enough.

To all of them, though, she replied with cryptic diplomacy, smiling, tilting her head, letting her narrow lips play tantalizingly, looking quickly at the questioner, then away across the room and changing the subject with poor skill; none the less effectively.

Men noticed the little band of lusterless gold on her finger; also the dead "diamond."

"Isn't a chance for me, is there?" they'd ask, still looking at the rings.

"Don't you worry, honey," she would confide. "*He* don't count no more; they's only one dearie for me!"

"And who's that?"

"Why, can't *you* guess, sweetheart?"

The smile thrown over the alluring shoulder and the pattering away toward the kitchen.

If the stranger noticed the furtive handclasp given another or the smiles and whispers lavished elsewhere, it only drew him further along.

If her generosity disgusted—well, he wasn't the sort Millie wanted at her tables, anyhow. For it all was with cunning design, all practised, all plotted under the glossy black hair in that wise little head.

There was a definite, material object. Tables filled with friends, with those interested in her, meant one thing—tips. Ordinary people who live in ordinary places like the Washington Café do not tip with any degree of regularity. But friends—the sort that Millie cultivated—tipped and, tipping, formed the habit.

At eight o'clock service in the Washington stopped. By eighty-thirty the place was ready for morning. Then the lights went out and the waitresses had finished another day.

Up the street scooted Millie, different now; head down, breathless if a man glanced at her, running a few steps now and then, out of the lights into the dimmer sections of the city's bosom where long rows of monotonous houses with fly-soiled Furnished Room signs in the windows stretched on and on toward the places of homes.

Then, flying up the discouraged steps, up the stairs in the hollow hall to the second landing, she dived for a door.

A spindling little girl, low over a much-thumbed public school text book, looked up quickly. She said:

"Oh, M's Keller! He's been just *too* sweet!"

But Millie did not heed. Her dowdy hat sailed to a cluttered chair and, bent over, eyes kindled, palms clapping softly together, she crossed the room toward a bed.

"Big Kid!" she called softly. "Oh, you Big Kid!"

A half sound from the tumble of quilts, a stirring among them, a cry from the girl and she had him to her, drawing him close, feeling his damp arms about her powdered neck, kissing his red, wrinkled face all over.

"Good-night; I'll be in early tomorrow."

Millie gave the child a hasty answer, a little nod as the door closed, and dropped into a creaky rocker with the baby.

She held him out before her with those olive, firm-looking arms that now ceased to be sensuous, and tossed him up and down, a new light in her face, a beauty that shone through the powdering and penciling, a glory that made the eyes tender and gave the silly little mouth character.

It grew and became almost a look of anguish as she pressed the little body against her and kissed again and again the small hand that clutched at her lips.

But it could not have been a hurt, for she broke into soft laughter, way down deep in her throat, and tickled the baby as she commenced unbuttoning his soiled day garment.

"Dollar sixty from th' suckers today, Big Kid!" she informed him with a pat. "Oh, it's a shame to take th' money! Honest, a dead shame! But we need it, don't we?"

She turned him on his stomach in her lap and under the light of the single gas jet rubbed her fingers over his back, tracing out the wretched curve in his spine, ceasing her chatter, sobering suddenly.

"We need th' money," she whispered.

And the baby gave a squawk, which flashed a smile into her face again as she lifted him up.

"What's that you say? 'Betcher life!' That's th' right answer!"

"We need th' money, Big Kid—we need it."

She straightened him and pulled the night-dress down about his head. And in the twang of the street again:

"After a while—after a while! A boob's born every minute! An' they fall for it, they do! We'll take all they'll give an' work 'em for more, won't we, Big Kid? Then, when they've give us enough, an' you're a reg'lar guy, with a straight back an' all—why—why we'll let 'em all go to th' devil!"

She ended with savagery in her tone.

That was the way Millie felt about it, and as she rocked the Big Kid to sleep she stared with serious eyes straight through the wall before her, hating the bald-headed man who had whispered thickly at her from the shelter of his newspaper that noon.

She could hate now, alone, but in the restaurant—it would be wild unwiseness. The little hoard grew with pitiful slowness as it was—treatment necessary to make the baby a "reg'lar guy" cost money, and a world of it. She must keep on, answering only with smiles such advances as the patrons of her tables offered.

Anyhow, there was consolation in the fact that the more they made her hate them and consequently the harder they made it for her to cover the fact, the larger became their tips.

Yes, this girl with a clouded, troubled face, who rocked her baby asleep, was the same Millie who flitted from table to table, smiled and tempted and used slang shot through and through with cheap endearments back there in the Washington Café.

This Millie who crooned tenderly as she scowled hate made it easier for the laughing Millie who toyed with impulses to accomplish the evading that was ever a necessary maneuver.

She grew so wise in the ways of men that she could tell almost to a meal when a new one was going to ask her to a theater or a café. To them was given her stock answer:

"Awful sorry, dearie, but I'm busy all this week!"

With a smile and an effective look that made them, the wise ones, wonder if, after all, she really was lying.

Ah, she brought about her immediate end gracefully enough, but she had her hours of torment when no mask could be effective, for Millie's soul was scarred. Against all men was she bitter. The Big Kid's father was to blame for that.

He had taken her youth, her spontaneity, and made it necessary for her to build up this sham self. And she only turned twenty-two!

Of course, life had its compensations, along with the rest; there were things for which to be thankful. The Big Kid first and always. Then, a kind God who sends slippery snow and moving freight cars—Millie's husband had been a switchman.

Too, the girl should have been thankful for the mere physical endowments which made it possible for her to play the game she planned and slowly build the treasure fund which was to take the kinks out of that white little back.

But her fragile mind did not go into things so deeply.

She thanked her God for the baby, for those other meager blessings, and demanded of Him—not consciously from any deity, but from the Something that had set things as they were—that It keep *her* as she was.

The Possibility haunted her always, spite of her hate for men. Alone it would have been different, but with the boy and—

She well knew the strength of temptation when Necessity stands with skinny hand outstretched. And it was the horror of the conception that kept on her finger the two rings. She hated them, but she realized that convention is a protector.

There came to eat at the Washington Café a tall, bony young man, with black hair and gray eyes which pried and pried and pried.

He looked so long at Millie on his first appearance that the girl became confused, accustomed as she was to stares.

Somehow this fellow did not look at her as others did; a piercing directness, a questioning, a seriousness in his gaze frightened her sharply. So it was with more deliberateness that Millie attempted to subject him to her charms and to play upon masculine weaknesses.

It was the third week before she played her trump—the hand squeeze.

He took his hand from the clasp of her fingers roughly and, with a look that expressed something like dismay, said just one word:

"Don't!"

Then he went up the aisle between tables, and the girl stood staring with unsteady pulse.

She was hurt, confused, made to wonder, tempted to think spitefully of him. But the memory of his reserve, his sobriety, lingered, and back through the range of impulses she went, settling upon the first. There she remained—hurt.

Thereafter a new sort of relationship sprung up. The man seemed to have ignored the incident. Millie, totally disarmed, was fearful of his bluntness.

She knew that her attractions were as nothing to him—at least, not in the sense that drew consideration from those others; she felt weak and without poise or place, while his personality grew great and greater in her sense of values.

She could not evade him with the foolish answers that seemed to satisfy others.

He talked to her as much as they did, but his side of the conversation was invariably interrogatory, and she found herself answering without the meaningless smiles, without reserve—at times directly against her will.

And they were serious questions, put with no skirmishing preliminaries; they made the girl weigh carefully her replies, and time after time she caught herself wondering what he had thought of the answers.

With the loud-mouthed, blustering sort Millie was at home, could handle herself under almost any condition. But this was something new—this seriousness, this quiet, this persistent prying into her own life with eye and voice!

"I don't know; he scary, Big Kid," she confided to the baby one night. "He sends th' creeps, kinda; an' yet you want him to keep talkin' an' lookin'." She gave a shuddering shrug of her shoulders. "He's quiet an' deep—an' they's somethin' to that kind—somethin' scary; somethin' to keep off of!"

And the baby made a sound that Millie translated into a lengthy agreement.

The night came when the boy could listen to no chatter, and the sounds he uttered so terrified Millie that she had no thought to put them into her own words.

She heard his crying as she mounted the stairs, and the strained note in it sent her staggering into the room. The little girl who watched the Big Kid daytimes stood at the bedside, scared.

"He's been cryin' for two hours," she said in a whisper as the mother drew back the covers and laid her hand on the fevered forehead.

And that next day Millie went about her work with swollen eyelids and a voice that was strained to the breaking point.

The gray-eyed man stared at her harder than ever, a slight flush creeping across his cheekbones.

"What's the matter?" he asked when she came with a fresh napkin and silver.

His voice was husky, as though with excitement or concern.

Millie shook her head and managed to keep back the choking that tried to break through.

"What's the matter?" he demanded again.

"I ain't goin' to tell," she declared, but the assertion lacked conviction.

"Well—if I can help you, let me know."

She did not meet his gaze.

That night the doctor said to her:

"I'm sorry. At Children's Hospital we're full, and will be for some time. This should have attention at once—that is, if you want to save this boy.

"You should have some one to advise you. I'm going out of town or I'd see what can be done. Haven't

you a man friend you could talk it over with?"

And, although Millie knew his motive was fine and prompted by serious interest, she recoiled as she shook her head savagely and muttered:

"I ain't got a friend — except th' Big Kid!"

After he had gone she spent hours calculating and comparing the figures she derived with those in her bank-book.

At the end she dropped the book to the floor and cried aloud, holding the hand close now and then to gaze hysterically at the band of gold; terror crept into her crying.

A man friend! She knew dozens—dozens who babbled like purposeless brooks, who were not made for thinking out things like this. And one—one who frightened her with his ominous placidity!

At noon this man called her to him. His voice was steady, as always, and his gaze compelled hers, though she tried to avoid it. The flush came again to his cheeks as he talked, but she did not notice. He said:

"I know a whole lot about you. You've told me—a little at a time. Now I want to know what the trouble is! I'll come here to eat to-night, and after I get through I'm going to wait. We'll go to a show—or somewhere."

And his vague alternative stirred in Millie all that suspicion that had kept her as she was, sent it to mingle with her undefined impression of the man, undefined yet tremendous in power. That a suspicion of him should come now added to its repulsiveness.

She turned from the table to hide her tears and walked slowly down the long room, satisfied that her fear of this fellow had been founded, that the vague misgiving he roused, which had at once warned and fascinated, would have been clear all along if she had stopped to analyze it.

She was satisfied of that, and forgot the long hours she had spent trying to pick out the elements of that unrest he set up in her heart. She told herself now that she knew; he was as the rest —rotten. Where they were frank and blatant, he—

She stopped short.

Necessity stood with skinny hand outstretched!

In the hour which she begged off during the afternoon Millie talked long and earnestly with the Big Kid. She told him all that must be done and of her incapability of thinking it out clearly; of her utterly friendless state, with no one to help her find ways out and choose.

"He's th' only one who looks as if he might know," she whispered. "Mebby he'll be square. It's worth it, anyhow, 'cause I'd die, too, if you did, Big Kid! An' if things goes—wrong—we'll—

"It's th' only chance left—an' what do you say?"

She half arose at that and leaned over him. In the feverishness that came with such concentrated, anguished thought her fancy may have misled her; but as the child commenced to cry once more she caught the twist of his lips, and with a blind faith in his understanding, his ability to answer, saw that it framed a word. It was: Yes.

In a dozen minutes the clock would toll midnight as Millie scooted up the stairs that night.

The spindling little girl was asleep in a chair; the baby whimpered.

Into the room the girl darted, awakening the childish watcher with a start.

She lunged straight for the bed, staggering the last stride and dropping to her knees with a thud. For a moment her voice wouldn't come.

"Oh, Big Kid!" she cried, gathering him close. "Oh, Big Kid—he's on th' level! I wasn't afraid—I just didn't know what it was. I'm dippy, Big Kid. I'm dippy about him, an'—an'—"

She pulled the baby closer and her hands fumbled with one another.

They came off together, those rings. Through wet vision she looked at them an instant, then, with a cry, flung them across the room.

"He's a telegraph operator an' makes thirty a week," she sobbed. "I —I didn't know—I was dippy an' didn't know. He makes th-thirty a week an' you — th' hospital in th' mornin'.

"Oh—he's nutty about kids!"

And, though the sobbing was bitter, it was merely the gall leaving Millie's soul. Her warped outlook had seen still water, knew that it ran deep, thought that all depths must be black. But now—

She drew the baby so close to her that he struggled as she sobbed again and again:

"I'm dippy — an' he's crazy about kids!"

THE FUR COAT

A SHORT STORY

BY FRANK CONDON

IT was one of those dreary, blustery days of perpetual tempest that make the month of March the most dreaded one of the twelve, and Central Park West, which is nothing more than Eighth Avenue in tailor-made clothes, shivered beneath three or four inches of feathery snow.

The Park itself seemed a place of dead things. Its denuded trees thrust their gaunt limbs into the storm and swayed dolefully in the wind. The paths were covered with snow, and there were no pedestrians as far as the eye could see.

On the west side of the avenue the apartment-houses seemed to shiver. Colored boys scurried in and out of ornate entrances, and those stray foot-passengers on the walks hurried as fast as their legs could carry them.

Gusts of snow whirled in circles and struck the face like a million needle-points, and the wind seemed to blow from the four points of the compass at the same moment.

Before a ten-story apartment hotel of the ultra-modern and ultra-extravagant type stood a seven-passenger motor-car of the touring variety. On this day of bitter storm, to look at the open seats gave one a chill.

It was distinctly not an afternoon for motoring in an open touring-car. Over the hood hung a heavy blanket to keep the engine from freezing stiff.

The door on the side nearest the walk was open an inch or two, and upon the rear seats—and almost covering them with its immensity—was a fur coat of gray, probably at one time the healthy possession of an adult polar bear.

Out of the storm there suddenly appeared a slim figure. It was that of a young girl in her early twenties, and as she strove against the wind it was manifest that she was insufficiently clad for such a day.

The wind buffeted her and the fine snow drifted into her face, and as she came even with the open motor-car an extra hard blast halted her progress completely.

Her eyes rested for an instant upon the machine and the great coat of fur within it. She was dressed in a light-brown overcoat and she was cold.

The open door seemed to bring her suddenly to a decision, and without further ado she grasped the handle, opened the door, and sank into the cushions, drawing the fur garment about her and over her so that she was completely out of sight.

The little drama was unnoticed, and for the next ten minutes there were no developments.

Then the double doors of the apartment opened, a lackey stepped briskly through, and held the outer door for the young man who followed.

He was warmly coated and gloved, and a bushy fur cap almost concealed his features. He walked quickly across the broad walk to the big car and lifted the blanket from its hood, tossing it carelessly into the front of the machine.

Then he slid down behind the wheel, touched the self-starter, and the engine sprang into life. A second later the car whirled off through the drifts.

In the rear, and still effectually concealed by the great fur coat, the slim young lady lay curled up and apparently not worried by the fact that she was in transit.

Block after block fled into the distance behind the rushing car, and twenty minutes later it turned east, passed quickly through a side street, and drew up before a big building of red brick.

The driver leaped out, pounding his hands together, and of a sudden his eyes detected a movement beneath the fur coat, upon which until now he had not bestowed a glance.

He stepped quickly to the side of the car, lifted the coat, and stared in amazement.

Two bright, blue eyes gazed back at him a trifle fearfully, and two rosy cheeks caused him to think of apples in the spring-time. A somewhat tremulous pair of lips prepared for speech.

Then the young man smiled and said, with a trace of embarrassment in his tone:

"This is rather a surprise. Would you mind telling me who you are?"

"No," the girl replied. "I will tell you who I am, but first I want to say that I am ashamed of myself and that I ask your forgiveness. I am here in your car on the impulse of a foolish instant — and because, until I crept under your coat, I was quite cold. Now I am warm. My name is Helen Cosgrave."

"Do you mean to tell me," the owner of the car demanded in astonishment, "that you got into my machine because you were cold?"

"That is the truth," the lady said. "That — and perhaps a sentimental reason that would only make you laugh."

"You are cold even now," he persisted. "This is a most unusual situation and—"

He paused. Two bright, cold tears appeared in the blue eyes and trickled down the rosy cheeks, in imminent danger of becoming little frozen balls of ice.

The slim figure sat very erect and tried to stifle the sob that was coming, but her effort was a failure.

The young man looked upon this pathetic spectacle for an instant, and then a feeling of great sympathy surged through him.

"This will never do in the world, Miss Helen Cosgrave. You must come out of that car immediately and tell me what the trouble is. I want to help you, and it is perfectly obvious that you need help. If you are chilled, what you need is warm food and a hot drink. This building is my club, but we can scoot to a restaurant on Broadway in no time at all. And I wish you would tell me something about yourself."

"I am hungry," the girl admitted faintly. "And my story is not very long or very tragic. But I feel that I cannot accept more than what I

actually need from a stranger. There is a modest little restaurant at which I ate when—at which I formerly ate —called the Green Teapot. Its prices are very low. That is why I select it. If you will take me there I will be very grateful to you, because, to tell the truth, I am dreadfully hungry and —and my money has all gone."

"Well, for the love of pink kittens!" said the young man, gazing at the girl in bewilderment. "I thought that such things as this took place in story-books and only there. This is a genuine adventure, and I am tremendously glad that I am able to help you. We shall dine anywhere you say and immediately."

"Thank you," said Miss Cosgrave.

She cuddled up anew in the fur coat. The driver hurried into his seat, and the big car hurried away, following the directions the girl had given.

The Green Teapot proved to be a quiet little restaurant on a side street, with bushes and small trees growing in tubs in the windows and festoons of leaves strung overhead.

A little hedge ran down the center of the room. The color scheme was green throughout, and a teapot of that color gave the restaurant its name.

The cheerful young gentleman led the way.

There was no obsequious head-waiter to bow the visitors to a table, because the Green Teapot did business with persons of small salary. They finally selected a table for two and sat down.

"Now," said the young man, "I would like to tell you that my name is Reade, and that I'm considered a pretty decent sort of chap, and that I feel mighty fortunate in being able to give you a little lift."

"I am glad to meet you, Mr. Reade," the girl replied. "You probably regard me as a very eccentric young woman, but when you have heard my story, perhaps you will be lenient in judging."

"You will tell me your story, then?" Mr. Reade asked.

"So far as it concerns my unconventional arrival in your automobile, yes. When I told you I was hungry and cold I told the truth, but there is a great deal more to tell. I am from the country, as you may have suspected.

"When I arrived in New York, some weeks ago, I had with me only a small sum of money. It was all that my father could scrape up. Our family's finances have recently suffered reverses, and things came to such a pass that I made up my mind to come to New York and earn money to send home. There is no opportunity in a small town.

"But somehow I didn't get along in New York. My efforts to find work were failures. My little store of money slowly melted away, and there came one afternoon when I realized that I must pawn my only possession of any value. It broke my heart to do it and—and it caused me to suffer real discomfort. But I did it."

"What was it you pawned?" her host asked with deep interest.

"It was my fur coat."

Young Mr. Reade stared.

"I have had it for years; and while it was not new, it was not worn. It reached from my throat to my feet. and there was something friendly and comforting about it. I have missed it dreadfully, and to-day, walking along through the storm, I saw the great coat in your motor-car. I suppose it was a foolish impulse, but I was quite cold, and I remembered how warm and cuddly my own coat had been, so I climbed in and—you know the rest."

During Miss Cosgrave's story, the man had been regarding her with ever-increasing interest.

Incredulity at first overwhelmed him, and finally amazement shown in his boyish face.

"I would like to ask you," he said, "whether it happens that your father's name is Martin Cosgrave?"

The girl nodded in surprise.

"And the little country town you come from is Mound City, Vermont?"

"It is; but you must be a wizard of some sort, because I did not mention those names."

"No, you did not," Reade returned; "but the fact is that in the great city of New York, one of the most wonderful coincidences I have ever heard of has just occurred. It is positively astounding. Would you mind telling me the financial circumstances that led to your coming here?"

"They are few and simple," Miss Cosgrave replied. "My father had been the sole owner of the Mound City Street Railway for years and years. There are three of us, mother, father, and myself. In Mound City, a few years ago, a crowd of unscrupulous politicians and blacklegs began to cast covetous eyes upon the Street Railway.

"They tried to buy father out at a ridiculous price, intending to use the car lines to obtain graft. Father refused to have anything to do with this unsavory crowd. Then they hired attorneys in Mound City and neighboring towns, and attacked father's title to his property. This went on for months.

"Father owned the railway outright. There was never any doubt about it, and no one had ever questioned it. Then the Mound City thieves, by bribery, secured a franchise from a corrupt board of aldermen, but father's line still rightfully controlled the streets; and when they saw that the lawyers of Vermont were not sharp enough to dispossess father, they sent to New York to a firm of attorneys.

"The result of it was that the New York man was able to do what the Vermonters could not. Without having right or justice on their side, father's opponents took his property away from him—proved to the courts that our old family title was an injustice to the town of Mound City. We were ruined!

"Mother and I were both sick in bed over it all, and father was nearly prostrated. His money was gone in the hopeless defense of his possessions, and his spirit was broken. Father is an old man. It was useless to think of his starting over. So I came here to New York, with what luck you know."

Young Mr. Reade listened in sympathetic silence. Once or twice during the recital he looked up as though about to interrupt.

A great emotion seemed to surge through him. He suddenly looked even younger than he was, and finally, when he spoke, his voice was husky.

"Miss Cosgrave," he began, "I spoke of a coincidence. This is it. I am the lawyer who went up to Mound City from New York and ruined your father."

The girl laid down her fork and looked at her companion in silence.

The friendly blue of her eyes changed to cold steel and the bloom departed from her cheeks.

"You are the man!" she repeated slowly.

"It is the hand of Fate that sent you to my car to-day," Reade went on. "Ever since that business was ended I have felt like a scoundrel, and now you come to add to my misery with the story of your own privations. The firm with which I am associated here in town outlined the campaign, and if I had known then what I know now, I would have refused to carry out the plans. But I did not know.

"What you have said is perfectly true. Your father's right to the property was absolutely flawless, but we were being paid a large commission. It was not our duty then to worry over the right or wrong, and there was no personal element to be considered then as there is now. I am to blame for the poverty that has come upon the Cosgraves. I never saw you

or your mother while I was in Mound City—"

"We were both ill," the girl interrupted.

"I was skilful enough to circumvent plain justice, but I regretted it when I saw that old man in court. And now you come and tell me your pathetic little story of the fur overcoat. I am a young man and ambitious, but I am not the vile thing you must think me. Let me tell you in detail what we did in Mound City to take away your father's property."

Helen Cosgrave listened with unsmiling lips. Young Mr. Reade talked earnestly and rapidly, his eyes shining with something akin to remorse.

"I have brought this upon you," he said at the end of his confession, "and I want to make amends. I have plenty of money. It is plain to me that I have been instrumental, and chiefly so, in robbing you and your parents in the manner I have explained. You cannot continue to struggle with poverty, and I know that you will never be able to make a living by yourself. Is there nothing I can do to help right this great wrong?"

Miss Cosgrave smiled slowly.

"You have already righted the wrong," she said.

On the opposite side of the hedge three men arose from a table.

Two of them were stenographers who had been writing unceasingly since the moment Miss Cosgrave and Mr. Reade entered and took their seats. The third man wore whiskers and looked like a lawyer.

"That is sufficient for our purpose, Miss Cosgrave," said the man with the whiskers, smiling across the hedge at the girl. "It is precisely what we needed to obtain a reversal of the judgment."

"Then that is all," Miss Cosgrave replied.

She arose and glanced into Mr. Reade's eyes. A sudden appreciation of what had happened swept over him and he rose angrily.

"This is a dirty trick!" he shouted, facing her.

"This is justice, if you must define it, Mr. Reade," she answered calmly. "You stole something. I have succeeded in getting it back. And whenever you think of this snowy afternoon, you might reflect that all the smart people do not live in New York. I bid you good afternoon."

A few moments later Miss Cosgrave was speaking on the telephone to the Hotel Grand. Her father answered her ring.

"It's all right, dad," she reported cheerily. "We've got the evidence of fraud we needed and the witnesses. I'll be up very soon, tell mother. These New Yorkers are very impressionable people—very!"

FROM THE FORTIETH FLOOR

By James Norman Hall

WHAT new Arabian Night is here?
What fantasy of some gigantic brain,
Lifting its gleaming towers
Above the reaches of this world of ours,
Into the far domain
Of windy silences? How thin and clear
The roar of traffic; and the far-off cries
As from a limitless abyss arise,
Where feverish, finite creatures still pursue
A vaster dream, a mightier work to do.

You can join THE CAVALIER LEGION and receive the red button with the green star free of charge by sending your name and address to the editor of THE CAVALIER, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, N. Y. Everybody's reading it now.

HEART TO HEART TALKS

BY THE EDITOR

WHOEVER had too much gold?

Some say the Incas, of Peru, had too much of the elusive yellow metal, the metal for which men have died, women have sold themselves, and the map of the world changed over and over from time immemorial.

Speaking of the Incas, they were a queer race. I suppose they had the finest community history has ever known—that is, the ideal, unselfish way of living. They had no money; neither was there barter and sale among them. The State apportioned to each according as the person earned. Every man worked at the trade of his father. Yet, in spite of all this, they had too much gold — literally — even though gold was only used for purposes of ornament, in the temples, etc.

At this writing news comes of the wonderful lost cities high up among the Andes which are gradually being unearthed by explorers. What a fascinating study it is, when you think of it, this wonderful nation that had too much gold.

You can't help comparing the condition of that people with that of the characters in the serial beginning next week, which is called

TOO MUCH GOLD

BY JAMES FRENCH DORRANCE

Sourdough Sally Kingsley is one of them, and she is a holy terror. Having been reared in the Klondike, she is anything but a prim and precise maiden; her manners are rude and her speech too vigorous to suit the instructors at a young ladies' boarding-school, and she is a woful misfit in the class-rooms and dormitory of the Misses Trent's Select Finishing School in Seattle. The girls shun her, for jaunty are her ways and frank her opinions. And all the boys who visit the school, for the most part of the crass type that rolls up its trousers and sticks a pipe in its mouth, are mortally afraid of her. She is a tiger lily, is *Sally;* and, lonely and defiant, she thinks longingly of the manly North and turns an avid eye toward the coastwise steamers leaving Seattle for Alaska.

Of course there are many avenues of escape from this intolerable situation.

One way to win surcease from her exile is to get expelled by the *Misses Trent.* This means of securing a return ticket to her beloved heath—or, rather, igloo—she mentions to *Skookum Moore* when he comes to see her at the school one day. *Skookum* is an old friend, and his word is law with *Sally.* He advises her against doing anything foolish. "Stay on here and get a little polish," he admonishes.

Sally agrees.

But the best laid plans have a habit of going wrong, and even iron must break at last. *Sally* cannot be good for more than a day at a time. In a few hours, she starts a baby cyclone and the *Misses Trent* ask her to leave the school and go back home.

And yet you won't blame *Sally* for what she does or the revenge she visits on a certain smart Aleck who is partly to blame for her expulsion from the school. Before she is through with him he has his fill of the Klondike, of mining camps and rich pockets. And before he is through with her—

But that is another story.

"TOO MUCH GOLD" is an 18-carat yarn, and it is doled out to you in three big nuggets, beginning March 21st.

"TOO MUCH GOLD" is the Tiffany setting in which we offer you a little gem of a novelette, next week, entitled

A WINDFLOWER

BY PAUL SCOTT MOWRER

laid in the Latin Quarter of Paris, where artists of all nationalities ply the brush and wield the mallet and chisel.

Mr. Mowrer introduces us to a little group of painters who are the satellites of the great *Féchard,* whose canvases are technically perfect and set all Paris raving.

And *Féchard,* besides being a celebrity, is a gracious host as well, and he often entertains his young admirers in his studio. One day, when they are gathered about him there, he introduces them to his latest model, *Simone.*

Simone is lithe and graceful, and has a face of wondrous beauty. Her sweetly wicked gray eyes sweep the company in a manner that speaks eloquently of a pure little heart aflutter with excitement at her surroundings, and a mind that is ignorant of the ways of men. A mere child is *Simone!*

"Get me some tobacco, *petite,*" says *Féchard.* "Here's the money. At the shop across the street, you know."

Simone goes to make the purchase, and one of the art students excuses himself and leaves the room. *Simone* never returns. She doesn't come to grief—"A WINDFLOWER" is not that sort of tale; but she enters another epoch of her life and her beautiful nature unfolds its petals like the anemone it is.

"DIVIDING WALLS," by Ruby M. Ayres, will nearly kill you delightfully—because it will almost tickle you to death!

When Miss Ayres writes a short story you may be sure that it is short only in the number of words. It is certain to be long in heart-interest, suspense, and entertainment.

Now, here they are—on one side of the wall a man with a little boy; on the other side a woman with a little girl. Before either married and had a little boy and a little girl, they were in love with each other. But she said nay to him because he had no money. Then she married, and then he married, and whenever they thought of each other, they hated like blazes.

So what do you suppose happened when, all of a sudden, they discovered they were living in the country on opposite sides of this big wall? Oh, yes, her husband had died and his wife had died, too!

Well, if you think this story winds up with the inevitable ending, you are apt to be mistaken.

"THE GORAI PEARL," by Albert W. Tolman, is the kind of story an editor may honestly rave about. Frankly, it is seldom that a story of the bottom of the sea comes into the office and makes such a commotion as this yarn did. Something unusual happened concerning "THE GORAI PEARL"—every editor in the shop was for it.

Here's your chance to determine whether or not the editors are a bunch of idiots or discerning gentlemen of taste and discrimination.

"DON QUIXOTE IN KHAKI," by Donal Hamilton Haines, is the second appearance of this splendid writer in THE CAVALIER. You may recall that his first story was "The Trouble with Ransom"—about the man who was going to rob and desert and forget until suddenly he learned he was going to be a father. Ah, by golly, that event will make a man if anything will.

This particular *Don Quixote* in khaki is a rube recruit from Illinois. He goes down in the Philippines to fight just because he is filled full of cheap literature on the subject. His very soul hungers for warfare. He wants to do big deeds such as leading a charge, rescuing the Colonel of his regiment single-handed, and then wrapping the Colonel's daughter around his neck and taking a running hop, skip and jump into safety.

Of course you know that fighting headhunters and all the other Philippine tribes is dangerous business. They are fanatics. Moreover, they know the country and they can stand it.

Was this Illinois farmer up against it? Well, I rather guess he was!

How did he come out?

Humph, this guy will treat you to the surprise of your life. He did me; and I've been down the line a little myself, if anybody should ask you!

"L. M. B." OF CHICAGO COMES BACK

EDITOR, CAVALIER:

I do not know whether or not you will allow me a curtain-call after having had the privilege of expressing my opinion before, but I was jumped on so hard for saying my little say about the now justly fa-

mous story "The Girl Who Saved His Honor" that I do feel I should have a come-back and the last word, because I am a woman.

My last word is this: I fully agree with a recent letter-writer who says that while he likes the letters of approval or disapproval, as the case may be, this being an open forum, he does not like it when members of your large CAVALIER family say unkind things to one another.

My criticism was really intended for a boost for THE CAVALIER if taken in the right spirit. The story seemed to me unworthy of our high-class magazine. My letter seems to have been entirely misunderstood.

I am a young woman, have lived most of my life in Chicago, and have seen much of the world. I do not mean to boast when I say I read most of the current magazines, and have been a wide reader as well as observer all my life. Of course I do not expect the Sunday-school element to enter largely into fiction, but my idea of a demoralizing story is where wrong is held up to be right. Perhaps I have not the correct viewpoint; perhaps I am not as analytical as I should be. But this, to my mind, was the fault of "The Girl Who Saved His Honor." We all know that plenty of women smoke, drink and gamble, among them the members of the "Four Hundred," as one of your readers aptly expressed it; but this makes it no less unpleasant.

One of your correspondents asked if I would be shocked in reading "Oliver Twist." No, indeed, for although that masterpiece enters largely into the worst phase of the largest city in the world, we never lose sight of its purpose, its meaning. Bill Sykes was a degenerate; but Nancy we must forgive, because she loved much and suffered much.

Neither do I consider the stories of George Eliot immoral, though they treat of immoral situations in life. These situations are never gilded. We never admire the mistakes of her characters, and we are not expected to. *Liane,* on the contrary, is represented as a charming type of modern young womanhood.

I hope I have made myself clear. I had no idea of wounding the fine sensibilities of your readers who admire that type of heroine.

In the respect above mentioned, Fred Jackson's stories are beyond reproach. His heroines are unconventional nearly always, but they fairly stand out in their purity.

THE CAVALIER is strictly all right, and I know you, Mr. Editor, are doing your very best to select stories that will appeal to the largest number of readers. So I suggest, as I am in the minority, that you print a sequel to "The Girl Who Saved His Honor." Perhaps *Liane* will reform in the last chapter. Wouldn't that be lovely?

L. M. B.

Chicago, Illinois.

A FAVORITE "ON SIGHT"

EDITOR, CAVALIER:

I bought a copy of THE CAVALIER this week for the first time, happening to see a story in the Table of Contents by a Boston writer. I read the magazine from beginning to end, and I guess I will have to become a regular reader from now on, for it was a fine number.

The story that caused me to buy the magazine in the first place was "On Sight," by A. H. C. Mitchell. The ending gave me a distinct shock. Then I read the other stories and enjoyed them all.

By the way, Mr. Mitchell wrote a baseball novel last summer that made a great hit. You ought to get him to do a long novel for you.

Good luck to THE CAVALIER.

J. C. MCKEEVER.

Y. M. C. A.,
Boston, Massachusetts.

CAUGHT BY THE MOVIES

EDITOR, CAVALIER:

I am very glad to hear of a sequel to "Captain Velvet's Welcome." It surely is much needed, for the story was a fine one. The ending, however, was unsatisfactory.

Why don't you secure stories from your old authors? None was better than "A Forty-Story Fugitive." Of course a few pessimists and cranks had to throw it down and stamp on it.

"Handicapped" was another fine one. Take it from me, most of the readers liked it.

I do not mind a touch of the occult once in a while. I enjoyed "Swami Ram's Reincarnation" very much; also the previous *Swami Ram* story.

By the way, I saw THE CAVALIER in the movies last night. It showed up quite plainly.

Here's hoping to see a few of the old run of stories in the near future.

Good luck to THE CAVALIER.

ROBERT M. BROOKFIELD, JR.

28 West Freedley Street,
Norristown, Pennsylvania.

NO JUNGLE, CANADA

EDITOR, CAVALIER:

You are still keeping me in at night to read THE CAVALIER.

"Wild Flower" was a fine story. "Captain Velvet's Welcome" warms up as if it would be good stuff. I did not care for "Mr. Pratt of Boston." I think the author stretched the power of occultism too far.

Your novelettes are great. "Marquard the Silent" was very good; but the writer evidently has the average American belief that outside of Montreal, Toronto, and a few other towns, Canada is just a wilderness. We hear very few true stories that in any way approach the tale of the North that the author narrates.

The six adventures of *Lieutenant Lawless* were excellent. I hope you will soon publish more by the same writer.

Please do not think that I am prejudiced against Americans, for I spend considerable of my time in your country and I enjoy every moment of it.

ALLAN W. HAYNES.

395 Shaw Street,
Toronto, Canada.

"O. K. ANYWHERE, ANY TIME"

EDITOR, CAVALIER:

I have been reading THE CAVALIER ever since the story "The Bells of Santa Rosa," by Thomas Ybarra, appeared. That was many moons ago.

Albert Payson Terhune is one of the old standbyes. Gladys Hall is some author, too.

Seems as if the reader in Yuma, Arizona, raised a little sand. I didn't notice what he had to say. Guess I missed that issue.

I have a stack of CAVALIERS on hand that I haven't read yet, but am flying into them now.

Have read your magazine in Minnesota, New Jersey, Ohio, and Alabama, and must say it is O. K. anywhere, any time, and helps a fellow pass time that otherwise might make him homesick.

IRA H. WITTE.

2205 Thirty-Third Avenue,
Birmingham, Alabama.

LIKES E. K. MEANS

EDITOR, CAVALIER:

I have a suggestion to make.

In my opinion Mr. E. K. Means has no superior anywhere as a writer of comic negro stories. Why not ask him to write a negro baseball tale? I am sure there are thousands of fans who would hail this with approval. And what would be funnier? At least, you might give this space and see what your readers have to say about it.

"The Sword of Ali Diab" was fine, and "Captain Velvet's Welcome" is the best Edgar Franklin ever wrote. Please keep him with us and give us more stories from his pen. "The Pirate of Panama" is simply great also.

DEWEY MYERS.

Hendricks, West Virginia.

A PIONEER TO THE FRONT

EDITOR, CAVALIER:

I have been a subscriber to THE CAVALIER since it was first published, and consider it the best magazine I have ever taken. In fact, I would be very lonesome without it.

I think "Alias the Night Wind," "The Return of the Night Wind," "The Love That Kills," and "The Empty Hand" were great. Indeed, it would be hard to pick out any stories that are not good, especially among the novelettes.

Wishing THE CAVALIER success and a large circulation.

M. R.

Brooklyn, Connecticut.

EVERYBODY WAITS FOR FATHER

EDITOR, CAVALIER:

I have been a true friend of THE CAVALIER for four years and can find no other magazine its equal.

If I am not home when THE CAVALIER arrives, father gets it. Then I have to wait. But if he goes from the room and leaves it behind, I run up-stairs with it.

I would like very much to join your CAVALIER LEGION, and would consider it a favor if you would send me a button.

Orlando, Florida. MERRITT FORD.

A SIX MONTHS' CONVERT

EDITOR, CAVALIER:

I have been a reader of THE CAVALIER for the past six months and cannot praise it enough. I am a great reader, and can say that there is no paper or library book or magazine that I enjoy more than THE CAVALIER. All the stories are good, in my estimation, although some are not up to the standard of others.

Please send me a CAVALIER LEGION button.

MRS. VICTOR R. MONBECK.

520 Woodward Avenue,
Detroit, Michigan.

WITH THE BEST INTENTIONS

A SHORT STORY

BY MARTHA McCULLOCH-WILLIAMS

AS the bishop said, "I christen thee Rolinda Fenway," a titter, subdued to a gasp, ran around the select audience.

An intimate family gathering, it had known Sarah-Sue was capable of much. But it had never dreamed how much.

If only Rolinda had been twins! Then Judge Roland Bassett, crusty bachelor for her grandmother's sweet sake, could have had the namesake he craved. Also and further, great-aunt Linda Hardin, who had been a mother to young Hardin Fenway, though no blood kin, might likewise have got the desire of her heart.

She was a masterful person, very near to a perfect gentleman, whereas the Judge lacked little of being as perfect a lady.

Naturally the pair hated each other heartily. As naturally they were furious over this welding of their names—as anybody but Sarah-Sue would have known beforehand.

Neither stayed for the christening feast, both quitting the house almost immediately in frozen ill tempers. That was rather pitiful—poor Sarah-Sue had had tearfully happy visions of reconciliation, through love for their joint namesake.

Both had money—both had all but said outright that the Fenway baby would inherit it. It is but just to add the fact had had less weight with Sarah-Sue than an honest hope of ending their foolish enmity.

Sarah-Sue was the sort so filled with good intentions they invariably slop over and mess things sadly.

Thus Fate delivered her first jab at the pink, wrinkled mite who really merited better usage. To aggravate the sharpness of it, Judge Bassett married the next month a languid widow who capitalized her loneliness—and died within the year, leaving her everything.

Aunt Linda made over her estate to Foreign Missions—charged with a sufficient annuity, and became a globe-trotter.

Then, before Rolinda was two, came a splendid baby brother, with next year a sister even more splendid, a prodigy of looks and lungs.

Waiting a bit, those precipitate benefactors might have salved their disappointment—but, as Sarah-Sue often said, things generally happen the way they should not.

Good intentions are immortal—in spite of the hardest knocks. As well ask the leopard to change his spots as the amiable blunderer to cease from blundering.

The biggest of Sarah-Sue's blunders was not merely pardonable but admirable. A family of seven, the handsomest children in the county, must be reckoned an economic blunder when the income remains practically fixed.

Fortunately it had been generous in the outset—thus, though in the end a tight fit, there was no lack of comfort. The Fenway farm, Fen-Willow, was rich and well tilled, but not big enough to make a social desert round about its indwellers. It lay ten miles from town and a mile off the turnpike—but what

with good horses and finally a modest motor, there was no isolation.

So when Rolinda came home finished, at nineteen, and beautiful enough to redeem her name, she found a gay world of goodly young people, among whom she quickly made for herself a distinctive place.

Then—if one dared write slang, one would say the jinx began to get busy.

Not daring, decline and fall we to Sarah-Sue. In the full tide of midsummer gaiety she brought in a disturbing element by inviting Eve Tressly to come and stay until Thanksgiving.

Rolinda sighed: "Mother, how could you! This is almost worse than my name."

She did not like Eve—Eve had indirect blue eyes and was of a pussy-footed spirit, which, walking always most delicately, kept you aware of sheathed claws.

Just now she was at loose-ends, one guardian-aunt abroad, the other in a sanitarium. Hence the invitation.

"I think you ought to be glad with so much company," Sarah-Sue answered proudly. "Seven beaux to supper last night. Eve will be the very greatest help—besides her example. You can't deny she is beautifully ladylike."

Rolinda sighed again, but ran away—she had known since she was five arguing with Mother was like climbing shifting sand. Father, her constant Ready Refuge, consoled her by saying that even Thanksgiving wasn't always, and further by promising her whatever she wanted for a great social occasion two months ahead.

To be exact, Judy Clavering's wedding.

Judy, twenty-one, an heiress and next to Rolinda the prettiest girl in the county, had set her heart on making the countryside sit up and take notice. It would do that over a wedding at high noon in quaint old St. Savior's, with a bishop assisted by the rector making the service notable.

The bridegroom would be not less so—old rose point a hundred years in the family, along with silver brocade. Twelve ushers would marshal the onlookers and make a fine procession down the aisle; but there were to be no bridesmaids, only a maid of honor.

Judy had explained to Rolinda in asking her to serve as maid: "It would be horribly unfair to the other girls—such frights as they would look compared with us two."

There was truth enough in the saying to make it sting when by ill luck it was repeated. Thus was bred a temper of edged criticism that would be more than Argus-eyed.

Yet it was not because of it Rolinda yearned to look her best. Her reason was masculine, gay, gallant, and upstanding—the best man, Joe Wickliffe by name.

They had met very briefly, but it thrilled her to recall the clasp of his hand, his look into her eyes as it came to good-by.

Nobody else, not all her swarming beaux, had ever so impressed her. Possibly that was why, until Joe came back a fortnight before the wedding, Eve Tressly did not become acute.

Eve had helped—a lot with the beaux, and more as a safety valve for Mother's good intentions. Also she had wrought marvels in the way of embroidery upon the maid of honor's corn-colored Canton crêpe.

Dull blue and pink and silver, fine faint gold, soft mist-gray, with here or there an accent of black or scarlet, she had interwoven until there was an effect of fire-opals that made of the frock a magic garment in which Rolinda was not merely a ravishingly pretty girl, but a more ravishing dream.

When she saw herself full length in it she blushed with delight thinking of Joe. He had seemed to like her in a sprigged muslin—what would he think of her so beautifully fine?

Eve seemed to divine her thought. With a little half-laugh, she said, touching her handiwork: "If this captivates

Joe Wickliffe, Linda, you'll owe me a lot. You know—don't you?—he's the greatest catch in seven counties—with expectations. No? Really! Well, you ought to know—unless you play your cards well—he's been so run after of course he is right down conceited—"

"Who runs after him?" Rolinda broke in with red hot cheeks.

Eve laughed softly, saying: "All of us, my dear. Woman's dearest right is to marry, whether or no, the richest husband she can."

"No wonder he found me refreshing—I'm not the running-after sort."

Rolinda mused as though Eve were non-existent—but that astute person knew she had sown the right seed. Seed of mistrust, which conjoined to hurt maiden modesty, might make Rolinda haughty and hateful instead of her fine bubbling self.

Eve had a way of marking down good catches as sportsmen mark down scattered coveys—Joe was one of several, also quite the most desirable. She knew him after a sort and had schemed for the invitation to Fen-Willow mainly upon the chance of knowing him better.

Tony Morgan, the bridegroom, was, she knew, his closest friend. Sarah-Sue's letters, real neighborhood chronicles, had given her a leading and later, confirmation of it.

Eve was not conscienceless, merely femininely selfish. She had her market to make—unless she made it prosperously she would go through life suffering either the gallings of dependence or the pinch of a tiny income.

Fate favored her.

Joe, coming for the gay doings preceding the wedding, found a Rolinda most unlike the girl of his dreams. She was gay—too gay, indeed; slightly cynical, with something appraising in her regard.

Notwithstanding, as her touch still set his heart trip-hammering, he might have broken through her armor of distance and merry audacity if Eve had not been at his elbow to explain it.

She began by praising Rolinda like a lover—all the finest words in the dictionary were judiciously showered on her rival.

Then, still by way of praise, she hinted at a crossing in love—Snaith Bronley was so fascinating—how could a girl resist him? So wild, how could a girl's parents help but disapprove him?

She did not take sides—her heart-warm sympathy went out to both. Yet—she had actually to reverence Rolinda's soul-attitude of aloofness to other lovers. An ordinary girl would console herself—if only for pastime.

"Most lies crystallize about a nucleus of truth." Rolinda *had* flirted, and rather breathlessly, with the fascinating Bromley, through a full fortnight. But this was before Joe's advent. Moreover, in the end, she had sent him about his business.

He, however, had been so persistent that her father had had to deal with him. Sarah-Sue had confided as much to Eve, after the manner of doting mothers who feel a recrudescence of their own triumphs in the conquests of their daughters.

It surely was a triumph to have brought Snaith Bromley to the point of a serious proposal—he was rising thirty, rich and well born, though dissipated, and notoriously not a marrying man.

The social mills ground on—with Eve's insinuations as grit in the wheels. If Joe and Rolinda had been free to avoid each other it would not have been so bad. Joe, first honestly puzzled, then as honestly resentful, withal grieved, stiffened into something like a plaster Chesterfield.

Rolinda felt the change in him and misread it into annoyance over his enforced attendance on her, when he so patently had rather have been with Eve.

Thus the pair had a very pretty quarrel, inaudible, however, to all but their own hearts. Eve certainly played her cards beautifully, never thrusting her-

self into the breach but managing to widen it steadily by significant looks, half-hints, and now and then smothered sighs.

Being very human, very masculine, Joe had small vanities in plenty. One was liking to escort the best dressed and most beautiful girl in any crowd.

Rolinda knew as much before Eve dilated on it setly. Hence she was very glad when, local millinery proving wholly inadequate, her mother undertook to make sure her maid-of-honor hat should be worthy of her frock.

"Trust me!" said Sarah-Sue, who was certainly clever at contrivance. Therefore Rolinda trusted to the last minute, even after Great-Aunt Linda, too rheumatic for further globe-trotting, wrote from the city.

"Blesky has just the hat you want — shape, colors, and all — and stylish beyond words. But — the price is a hundred and fifty dollars — it would be wicked to pay it, even if you could afford it—which I know you can't—and I won't.

"Instead, I shall send your daughter" (Great Aunt Linda never by any chance wrote the name she hated) "a perfect copy. She can take it as her Christmas present from me—I know a girl who makes delectable hats—besides she gets things ridiculously cheap through her trade connections.

"Even then the hat will cost twenty-five dollars, not counting in the bird of paradise — which I brought home from Ceylon on my last tour as a curio—but better than any now in the shops. The man who is mounting it says so.

"The wedding comes so inconveniently early in October we shall have to hurry. But you may depend on getting the hat in time."

October weather has its vagaries—they range from perfect to perfectly awful. This October's first fortnight had all the moods and tenses of weeping skies. Now they pelted, now came down in woolly fog, now winds crept guiltily through, now they roared in hurricane fashion, driving thunder-clouds in mass before them.

Hard line for all who must go about, rain or shine. Especially parcel postmen. What wonder their moods are as uncertain as the weather? What wonder either that when there came into the charge of a grizzled veteran a smart hat-box sufficiently corded but unwrapped, so the label of a smarter shop could be read by all who ran, it was tumbled into a wagon under many solider but less bulky packages and trundled on its way, the veteran the while saying to his helper:

"Must be folks mail parcels in that shape a purpose to get 'em squshed. Well, this time they won't be disappointed."

Comment showing how well he knew his business. In the sorting-room the box-lid showed a rakish list to port—at the next handling aboard a mail-car one side was completely stove in.

Notwithstanding the style, the cardboard was the sort that thaws visibly in rainy weather.

After the third transfer there was such a flattening out of angles and corners the mail clerk scrawled on below the address: "Received in bad condition"—to which a wag who was next in charge added simply: "Worse! Worst!"

Then came a long, long stretch — hundreds of miles, while the battered hulk settled momently into a mass more compact and more crinkled. It had become a sort of isosceles triangle in general outline, but with dips, spurs and sinuosities all over.

Some merciful hand tied the loosened cord tighter—thus it was possible to transfer it to the local carrier, who pored over the half-effaced address, shook his head, and sighed: "Ef this ain't the beat of all!"

Fortunately he had bowels of compassion, this carrier man. Due at Fen Willow around twelve o'clock, he knew enough of the situation there to hurry himself by an hour.

The wedding was set for twelve o'clock, and St. Savior's was three miles beyond Fen Willow. The shapeless parcel must hold the hat, concerning which there had been already much poignant inquiry.

Sarah-Sue had recklessly telegraphed for news of it—she had not dared to tell Rolinda the answer had been, "By parcel post."

She herself stood at the gate, a nervous wreck on the verge of tears. A lowery morning had melted to drizzly rain — under her big umbrella she looked like a disconsolate elf under a big toadstool.

"You've got it! Oh, thank the Lord!" she ejaculated, seeing the carrier lift something of size from the ruck.

Next breath she all but screamed—he was handing her the triangle and saying kindly: "Ef I was you, Miz Felway, I wouldn't receive that. You've got a clear case o' damages ag'in' whoever mailed it so onfitten fer carr'age."

Sarah-Sue heard not a word—she was rushing houseward the triangle hugged to her breast, heedless of rain and mud — a tragic figure of haste. She must open the thing before Rolinda—blindly she stumbled, fell flat, with the parcel underneath, and scrambled up, dripping soft mud, to find her husband lifting her, her son and second daughter at either elbow, Rolinda and Eve, in full wedding panoply looking anxiously from the wide hall door.

Upon the table there, with everybody on tiptoe, Hardin junior cut the twine; Little Sue, his sister, excavated from layers of sticky cardboard and soggy tissue-paper that which had been a creation and was now a ruin.

Literally it had been knocked into a cocked hat, the brim of crêpe and real lace bent, the fringed scarf muddy at one end, the bird of paradise reft of a wing, with a broken eye and half his beautiful tail likewise broken midway. Originally a masterpiece of simplicity, it was beyond redemption. Rolinda glanced from it to her wonder-gown and back — then dropped her face in her hands, shuddering.

"You—you can't—wear it!" Sarah-Sue choked out.

"I must—I have nothing else—" Rolinda moaned.

"Go bareheaded Little Sue.

Eve was busy with the ruin, bending, straightening, smoothing crumples — her deft ministrations brought the hat back to a ghost of itself.

But the scarf shorn of mud-stain looked skimpy, the broken bird tag-rag-y. Do what one might, crinkles showed faintly in the brim-line.

In the midst of all Judy called imperatively over the phone: "Hat come, Linda? If you are not waiting at the church for me I shall simply die of horrors — the day is enough without this extra strain."

"I'll be there—hatted," Rolinda answered grimly, while Sarah-Sue sobbed hushedly and Eve turned her head to hide a covert smile.

Martyrs have been crowned for less than Rolinda suffered passing up St. Savior's aisle. She had a sense that somehow people were looking and laughing as they had listened and laughed at her christening.

Judy had not noticed in the dusk of the vestibule—those keen eyes of hers would flash as they saw true. That was what hurt worst — this shaming of her friend—she would not admit the piercings of Joe's critical gaze.

The hat vulgarized her hopelessly—made her tawdry and uncouth — yet she had not dared to appear without it.

She had a wild impulse to tear it off and stamp on it—it remained only an impulse. Outwardly she was calm, a breathing statue with set mouth and eyes downcast.

Thus she stood throughout the long ceremony, thus at last she went down the aisle beside Joe. He looked at her oddly as he handed her into his car—they were going back to Clavering for a grand wedding breakfast.

She shrank into her corner, but sat very straight, gazing ahead with eyes that did not see. Joe wiped a moist forehead, ejaculating: "It's over—thank the Lord! Now—maybe this beastly weather will clear."

"Per-haps," Rolinda said frozenly—it was all she dared venture.

Joe tried again. "I couldn't get married this way," he hazarded. "Simply could not! If ever I'm so lucky—won't be any fuss and feathers."

"Brides have the say-so—and Judy is not the only one who likes fuss and feathers," Rolinda managed somehow to answer.

"Indeed! Who else dotes on 'em?" Joe queried.

Rolinda caught her breath, saying gallantly, "Why—Eve for one." Then quickly, "Isn't she stunning today?"

"As usual," Joe answered heartily, his mind's eye pleased with a pompadour vision, perfect in every detail—especially the hat whereon pale-pink roses smiled out amid billows of blue illusion.

Rolinda, viewing the same mental picture, dropped her face in her hands. In spite of herself she sobbed once, a strangled sob, for which she hated herself.

How could he help contrasting the two of them—he, to whom the desire of the eyes was so vital? Until now—she had hoped in spite of everything—it appalled her to find how much. She had made him ashamed of her—he would remember her as the girl who had made a frump of herself.

It was like her name, part of mother's crushing good intentions. She might better have worn the sprigged lawn and a sunburned straw than been so incongruously bedizened.

She turned upon Joe, her cheeks scarlet, saying: "Put me down at home, please—and take Eve on in my place."

"Do you hate me so badly you can't endure me a little longer?" he asked, breathing quickly.

Rolinda's eyes answered him.

What he read there must have gone to his head. Reaching over, he snatched away the draggled hat and flung it the car's length, then gathered his sweetheart's bare head to his breast, whispering:

"You wicked sinner! Nobody *can* take your place!"

A ROSE

By Glenn Norbrey Pleasants

A WINTER rose—a single blushing rose—
Bloomed near my way.
Around it gleamed the storm god's drifting snows,
The skies were gray.
And yet, pink were its cheeks, its head poised high
To brave the blast;
I looked at it with fascinated eye
As I walked past.

And lo! the skies above me seemed to shine
With new-found light;
The snow was something beautiful, divine—
A different white.
Although with cold my quivering flesh was blue,
I did not sigh—
If that frail bud could live the winter through,
Then so would I.

TINFOIL CHARLEY

A SHORT STORY

BY GARDNER HUNTING

"NOW we'll see whether murder will out!"

The man with the shovel straightened his bent back as the boy with the newspapers came down the snowy street. He ceased stirring the muffled echoes, which alone broke the quiet of the gray suburban dawn, and he looked eagerly, almost avidly, at the youngster.

In a French window on the porch of the big house, standing well back from the pavement the shoveler had been industriously cleaning, a man moved hastily away from an outlook from which he had been narrowly watching; and, presently, the door on the porch opened rather noisily.

"Here, boy, hurry up! You're late this morning."

The call came from the veranda, where only little crumbly clumps of snow had survived the shovel of the man in the street.

"I'll take it to him," said the shoveler, putting out a hand—a compelling hand—for the paper. Then, under his breath: "This will tell!"

The boy, whose mittened hands fumbled the papers clumsily, looked up curiously. His eyes widened slightly as the shoveler started to take off his left glove—a glove of woolen knit fabric—then hesitated and removed the other, to take the paper.

The man in the porch came down one step impatiently.

But the shoveler held up the paper and looked at the big first-page headlines, peeringly in the gray dawn-light. The man on the steps fumed.

His left hand was in his pocket, jingling coins. He snapped the fingers of his right, however, with consuming irritation at delay.

The shoveler reached the steps at last. He held up the paper for the other to see. "Well, Mr. Vardon," he said, "I see they got a description of the murderer."

"You seem deeply interested in the murderer, McCroy," returned Vardon.

"I am, sir. You never can tell where such a chap is going to turn up, and the reward is big—five thousand, sir."

"Just so."

McCroy, the shoveler, held the paper well to the other's left side; but Vardon reached with his right hand for it. His left still jingled the coins in his pocket.

"Seems somebody has sent the police an anonymous letter relating that the murderer is a bald, near-sighted man, with a scar on the inside of his wrist, sir."

"An anonymous letter?" Vardon regarded the laborer again sharply. "You are a man of some education, McCroy."

"Yes, sir; I went to school as a boy."

Vardon shook out the paper with his right hand. "Scar on the wrist," he repeated. Then he paused to read the head-lines.

The shoveler stood waiting. He watched the other from under deep-bent brows.

"Which wrist?" asked Vardon.

"It doesn't say, sir. Odd omission, isn't it?"

"Very."

The householder looked down and observed his man as the latter slid his big right hand again into its woolen glove. Then he read the head-lines once more. He read them aloud—the broken fragments that interested him most.

"Bald and near-sighted," he said, moving the paper closer to his eyes in the twilight of early morning to see distinctly. The man on the walk below him moved a little nearer and almost squinted up at the other's face.

He put up his hand and scratched his head thoughtfully under his cap. Then he readjusted his cap with care.

"Who could be writing letters of description?" asked McCroy with the humility of the inferior who has an opinion of his own he aches to express.

"Some smart Alec, or faker, probably. Hardly possible it is a genuine revelation from some one who knows. Might be the method of some enemy of the murderer, of course—or of some disgruntled accomplice."

"Of course, sir — some enemy or disgruntled accomplice, if the letters carry genuine information. Interesting, isn't it?"

"Indeed it is. Where do you come from, McCroy?"

"I, sir? I come from the West—Chicago, to be exact, sir."

"How did you happen to apply here for work? How did you know that I was looking for a good man yesterday?"

"Why, I didn't, sir. I only heard that you had just moved in here, and I — took a chance, as the vernacular has it."

"H-m!" The householder read his paper again. He held it almost at arm's length. "Been in the city some time, I take it, from your recommendations."

"Yes, sir; some time."

"H-m!"

Mr. Vardon looked steadily at his paper. His eyes, however, had none of the side-to-side movement of one who reads the lines of type. The other watched.

"Ghastly murder!" said the householder presently.

"Horrible, sir," returned McCroy.

"Apparently without a motive beyond the possession of that small diamond."

"Looked like a grudge killing to me, sir. The diamond was too small to tempt a crack, as the murderer must have been. Novices don't kill by puncturing the medulla oblongata with a needle."

"You seem familiar with thugs' methods, McCroy. You haven't been —in the police?"

"Oh, no, sir! I'm only a newspaper reader. And I have some knowledge of physiology."

"Evidently. Have you finished the walks?"

"No, sir. I shall in ten minutes."

"When you do, the cook will give you your breakfast. Do you want to go to town with me to-day? I have to carry up some rather heavy grips, which I do not care to send. I'd like you to carry them for me."

"Very well, sir. Anything you say, sir."

The householder turned to his door. The man of work looked up swiftly at his back. Mr. Vardon withdrew his left hand from his pocket and reached for the knob.

The man on the walk ducked his head and stared at the hand beneath the elbow. The other's movement was swift, however. McCroy turned away, rubbing his eyes slightly with the back of his gloved hand.

He went out to the gate and took up the shovel. Presently the window of the front room, from which Vardon had earlier watched for his paper, took on the glow of interior lighting. The householder drew a chair before the glass and spread his sheet of news.

But he glanced out at the shoveler before he began to read. The shoveler turned his eyes up once toward the window. As he did so, the man

with the paper was slowly smoothing the well-brushed brown hair over his forehead.

The shoveler suspended the motion of his work for an instant as he observed the fact. Then his eyes narrowed as he looked back at the snow still to be cleared away.

The man at the window in the big house turned his head as the shoveler progressed toward the end of his task. The paper sagged downward in his hand as he studied the bent form, as if the attitudes and movements of the worker were not the most natural in such labor.

Then, as the other straightened up once more at the end of the pavement, where it touched a neighbor's line, he regarded his paper again attentively.

The laborer knocked the clinging snow from his shovel against the pickets of the fence, looked about inquisitively at the other workers appearing, then tramped slowly back to the gate and inside. Around the house he followed a way he had already cleared to the kitchen door.

Setting the shovel on the steps, he knocked and was admitted to the yellow glow of gas-light, and the smells of chops and hot muffins and buttercakes.

The broad-hipped woman at the stove looked him over with neutral acknowledgment of his presence. She set out a plate of steaming food on the table by the back window.

"I s'pose the mornin' paper's came?" she queried with more interest than she exhibited in the man himself.

"Yes," responded McCroy. "Mr. Vardon's reading it."

"Anything in it?"

"Yes. The police have a description of the Brury murderer."

"You don't say!"

"Somebody's sent it to them anonymously."

"Say! What do you know about that?"

"I don't know anything about it. Only the paper says he's reported to be a bald man, near-sighted and having a scar on his wrist."

"Say! You don't say! Which wrist?"

"No; I don't say—which wrist. The paper didn't."

"That's funny. Ain't it the limit, though, that murder? Ain't it the deep mystery? Only one little dimund, set in a plat'num moon, 's only thing taken off him. An' a needle stuck into the back of his head! Uuh! Fierce, wasn't it?"

The worker fumbled at his cap with his gloved hands. Then he took it off. The top of his head shone, despite the gray-black fuzz of short hair sparsely covering it.

He glanced at the cook. Then he drew off a glove—the right, and ran his palm over the fuzz. He pulled down the long cuffs of his soft white shirt; then removed the other glove. He sidled down to the chair at the table, with his left side to the wall.

He began to eat hungrily.

The door on the far side of the kitchen opened and a maid in cap and apron came swiftly out with a tray. She looked in mild surprise from a pair of bright brown eyes at the man by the table. He looked back at her with a slight query, then coldly, and continued to eat.

The maid began to help take up the food for the dining-room. Abruptly the door through which she had come opened again and Vardon stood on the threshold.

His eyes went straight to the shoveler. They traveled over him hastily. "Oh, McCroy!" he exclaimed. "You found your way to breakfast, did you?"

Vardon stepped out into the gaslight and leaned against the door-casing. His left hand was easily in his pocket, jingling coins.

The man at the table started up, as if to get to his feet.

The hand that had held his fork, the one next the wall, dropped down

beneath the table. The other laid his knife on the cloth and grasped the chair-back for an instant. Then he subsided.

"Yes, sir," he replied.

The householder straightened his shoulders slightly. The gleam of a thin gold chain on his waistcoat beneath the lapel caught the shoveler's eye. He observed the red mark on the high bridge of the other's nose where glasses had rested.

It showed plainly in the light.

"I see this anonymous letter describing the murderer—or purporting to—suggests his identity, too, McCroy," said Vardon.

The cook turned suddenly to look at her employer. She nearly dropped the fork she held as she stared.

"Yes," returned McCroy. "Tinfoil Charley."

"How did you know?"

"I saw the paper as I came up the walk, you remember, Mr. Vardon."

"Oh, yes. Tinfoil Charley! Ever hear of him in your—police work?"

"I was never in the police, Mr. Vardon. But I have heard of Tinfoil Charley. He was bald and near-sighted and had a scar on his wrist."

"What do you know about him? This is very interesting."

The householder came slowly across the room and stood by the kitchen door, with the table between him and the other. He still jingled his coins.

The man at breakfast reached across his plate with his right hand to pick up his fork. Then he neglected his chop and began to eat dry cakes, with the single implement, absently, as if he had no interest in the food.

He looked up examiningly at the face of the other man.

"I saw Tinfoil Charley once," he continued. "He was a man of about medium height, I should say, rather thin, nervous, with the manner of a gentleman. It is a good many years since, but I fancy I might know him again, if I saw him. The scar would be the sure mark. I never saw but one like it. He escaped from prison at Jackson, Michigan, eighteen years ago, was arrested again—and that was when I saw him—but he got away once more and has never been caught since. I've heard that he turned straight and had become prosperous, but that is only rumor. It was his favorite method of killing — this medulla oblongata thing."

"His fav'rite!" gasped the cook, while the brown-eyed maid stood staring at the laborer by the table.

"Oh, yes; he was several times a murderer."

The householder held out the paper to his man. The latter laid down his fork to take it. He glanced at the headlines again and then moved the paper closer to his eyes.

The householder leaned forward with a sudden odd movement of intentness and stared almost as the maid had done. Abruptly McCroy's eyes came up from the paper's page and met his.

"What was the scar like?" asked the cook breathlessly.

"The brand of a round seal, in the letter B."

"Oh!" Vardon straightened sharply. "I seem to remember, now. I read about him at the time. He had a pal. The pal's name was Burns or Brins or Binns, or something like that."

"The pal's name was Breen—Dan Breen."

"You have a remarkable memory," commented Vardon.

"I was an impressionable youth, when I saw Tinfoil Charley," returned the other.

"Seems to me the pal squealed on Charlie?" Mr. Vardon squinted his eyes to force his memory.

"Charlie double-crossed his pal." McCroy's voice was positive. "It was a dirty thing he did, even for him," added the shoveler, quietly.

"What did he do?" queried the cook, unreproved so far for interrupting, and quite pop-eyed with interest.

The little maid was leaning back against the handy kitchen cabinet with her fingers spread wide against its panels behind her, and very still.

"It seems they looked a lot alike—that was part of the game they played, trimming boobs—and Charley made a getaway and then steered the officers by message so that they caught Breen, thinking he was Charley. And Breen couldn't prove his own identity—or didn't want to—and they sent him up as a lifer in Charley's place. They don't hang for murder in Michigan, you know."

"But, how do they know it was Breen they sent up? And if they do, they have released him, of course?" Vardon was leaning forward once more.

McCroy looked up again directly into the householder's eyes. "No, he got away, too. They were slick, those two."

"How do they know now, then, that it wasn't Charley all the time?"

"They don't. It was told to me by Charley's own wife, with whom he lived for awhile after he escaped arrest. He deserted her later."

Vardon's eyes opened wide. "And you know Tinfoil's wife, too?"

"Yes. Why not?"

"If you weren't in the police, what were you?"

"I've been a newspaper man, Mr. Vardon."

"Oh!" The householder looked suddenly at his cook and maid. He turned toward the dining-room door. "Better serve breakfast," he said. "This is very interesting, but I can't talk more of it now. You'll go to town with me this morning, McCroy."

"Yes, sir."

The door closed behind the householder. The man at the table swallowed the last of his cakes and rose quickly. The cook was still staring at him helplessly.

"Better take in the breakfast," he said to her. Then he went out the door.

He went down the steps rather quickly, then into the path that led to the front of the house. He almost ran as he approached the steps of the front porch. A broom awaited him there, and he seized it and began to sweep out the deep veranda.

As he did so, he glanced in at the library window. No light was there now, for daylight had arrived in full; but at the telephone stood Mr. Vardon, plainly to be seen from the window. His back was toward the man outside.

McCroy suddenly raised the broom deliberately and dashed the handle against the glass. It crashed in with a harsh jangle. The man at the phone leaped and swore, dropped the receiver and whirled.

"Oh, Mr. Vardon, sir! I'm so sorry. I stumbled and hit the glass with the broom," explained the laborer through the ragged hole in the pane.

The householder stared. "I was just telephoning," he began.

"I see you were, sir. I'm very sorry to interrupt you so. I—"

"It's of no consequence, McCroy. You couldn't help it. And I couldn't get my party, anyway."

"I s'pose they have a lot o' calls a morning like this."

"Who?"

"Why, the police."

"How did you know I called the police?"

"Oh, I heard you—through the window, sir. I thought probably you wanted to know more than was in the paper, sir. But there must be many calling the police this morning."

"Perhaps that's it," assented Vardon. "Well, I'll wait. Better pick up that broken glass. I'll send George to paste a sheet of heavy paper over the break till we can get the glazier."

"I'll fix the paper, sir, if you have the paste here in the library. You go get your breakfast."

McCroy slipped his hand inside the window and unfastened the catch. Then he stepped in.

"Very well," said Vardon. He turned and passed between the curtains.

McCroy listened to the departing footsteps for a moment; then suddenly he turned. His eyes sought something on the library table, eagerly, hastily. He bent far over to see among the things with which it was littered.

Presently he found a pair of shears.

He caught them up, ran to the telephone, seized the cord that connected it with the wall, traced it to the box, low on the baseboard beside the desk and stooped over the connection. In a moment there was a sound of a sharp click as the shear-blades severed something of considerable resistance.

The stooping man stood up and looked about. Then he laid the shears on the wide table again and went to the hall door.

All was quiet. Hurriedly the man of all work crossed the hall and peered into the dining-room door. A plate of batter-cakes smoked on the table, but no one sat before them.

He stared an instant, then he tiptoed in a hopping run across the room and opened the kitchen door. He came upon Vardon, just slipping into an overcoat which the little brown-eyed maid had brought him.

The householder looked up with a start. Silently McCroy's eyes met his for a fraction of a second. Then the laborer spoke easily.

"I came to ask for some heavy paper," he remarked, turning half to the cook, who had again suspended culinary operations to stare. She seemed to discover something in the air that needed explanation to her unready intelligence.

"You're not getting ready so soon to go, are you, Mr. Vardon?" asked McCroy.

"Yes," Vardon answered; "just getting on my coat. I left it in the garage last night, it seems. Lilly just brought it— Ah, have you mended the window yet?"

He did not seem to relish his position, for some reason; but he smiled.

"I came after the paper."

"Oh, yes. Well, we'd better let George do it, I think. I want you to go to town with me. Haven't you—haven't you an overcoat?"

"No, sir. But I don't need one."

"Of course you do. Lilly, bring that gray coat of mine from the hall closet. McCroy, you are about my size. You can wear that. Better bring one of the felt hats you will find there, too, Lilly."

The maid started back through the dining-room. The master followed. The man stood still for an instant as if he hesitated to accept this bounty.

The cook waited till the door closed on her employer. Then she stepped hastily forward.

"Say," she whispered, with a guttural rasp, "what about the scar on that feller's wrist? Couldn't they tell it wasn't him they got when they looked at his pal's wrists?"

McCroy regarded her with eyes which narrowed with the slow approach to something resembling mirth. Then he shook his head.

"I hear that each of those fellows had branded the other with the same mark when they agreed to stick together," he said. "Breen's got the B in his wrist, too."

"Well, what do you know—" The woman stopped because her breath failed. Then, "Mr. Vardon—does he know that?"

"I shouldn't wonder," answered the other.

McCroy pushed quickly through the door into the dining-room and thence into the hall beyond. The maid was there, just removing a heavy coat and a hat from the closet. She did not speak as she offered to hold the coat for him.

Neither did he as he slipped into it.

He was listening. When he had taken the hat and had given the girl the old cap he stepped to the library door and looked quickly in. Vardon

was standing with the telephone in his hands, impatiently joggling the hook up and down.

As he saw McCroy he put the receiver quickly on the hook again.

"Operator doesn't answer now," he said. "Such service! Ready?"

"Yes, sir," answered the laborer.

They went out of the house together. Together they stamped through the snowy streets. McCroy carried two weighty grips. They did not talk much.

When they arrived on the long, stone platform of the suburban station the train was just puffing around the bend and under the street-bridge above the yards. It rolled in beside them before they had time to enter into conversation.

They mounted the steps and found seats in the nearest car when the train stopped. Then Vardon split the paper he had brought with him and gave a part to his companion.

Neither man removed coat, gloves or hat, though the car was warm. All around them the passengers called the greetings of acquaintances, shed their coats, opened their crackling papers or spread cards upon lap-board tables and cut for deals.

The two men who retained their coats appeared to have no acquaintances. They read industriously. Vardon sat next the window, with his left shoulder against the glass as he held his half of the sheet near his eyes and adjusted his glasses. McCroy folded his paper small and held it in his woolen-covered fingers.

His part of the paper contained nothing about the Brury murder. Vardon was still conning the details of that. McCroy read little.

Almost without change, except for a shift of position, and certainly without conversation, they rode to the city. When they stepped out of the station and on the deck of the ferry, Vardon looked curiously at his companion.

"How does the hat fit?" he asked.

"All right, sir," answered McCroy.

"Coat's a bit loose?"

"Just a bit. You're heavier than I am, sir. You must have— Do you always cross on the ferry, sir?"

"Sometimes I take the tube. I like the light on a morning like this. You were going to say—"

"Oh—that you must have twenty pounds more than—I have, sir."

"Yes," assented Vardon.

He looked out over the rail at the shining river. A slight pucker came in the thin skin about his eyes. He glanced almost furtively at McCroy. The latter was staring also at the river.

"McCroy, have you always lived in the West?" asked Vardon.

"Oh, no, sir. I was brought up in New York."

"Ah!"

"Yes, sir. I once knew a lot of people on Manhattan. The city has changed, sir."

"Yes. The city has changed much in—eighteen years."

"Eighteen, sir?"

"Wasn't it eighteen you said?"

"I said Tinfoil Charley escaped from Jackson prison eighteen years ago."

"And you were there then?"

"I saw him about the time."

"Have you been — in New York since?"

"Oh, yes, sir. Often. I've been looking for a man—to meet a man I knew here once, but I've happened to miss him every time I've come. He is a great traveler. I came hoping to meet him this time. I expect I shall. He's in town."

"Then you won't be working for me long?"

"Not long, sir. Sorry, sir."

"How long did they keep Dan Breen—was that his name?—in prison after Tinfoil got away?"

"Twelve years."

McCroy said the words rather solemnly. His lips closed upon them as if he realized that twelve years might be a lifetime to a man confined for a crime he had not committed.

"Well, didn't Breen have it coming to him for something else he might have done, even if he didn't do the thing he was confined for?"

McCroy looked up. "He was never convicted of anything deserving that sentence, I should say, sir."

"You've seen Breen, too, I take it?"

"I've seen his picture often, sir—and known his family."

"Oh! You've known the families of both these men, then—Breen and Tinfoil Charley?"

"Yes. I told you I was a newspaperman, sir."

The boat docked at the foot of a narrow street and the crowd began to move up into the heart of Manhattan.

McCroy picked up his grips and followed his principal.

They went up to Broadway, crossed that thoroughfare, and entered a building of the narrow, old-fashioned sort. They waited for an elevator.

"Wait a moment, McCroy," said Vardon, after they had stood together through a brief delay.

He turned quickly and spoke to the starter. McCroy had set down the grips. He stood between them.

He made a quick step toward his employer, as if to warn him that the car was coming. But the grip by his foot caused him to stumble. Before he recovered Vardon had turned from the starter.

McCroy flushed redly, as if his own awkwardness had embarrassed him. But he lifted the grips again as Vardon entered the elevator ahead of him.

They walked out upon the sixth floor. Vardon put a key in the door of an outside office and opened it. He let McCroy in.

Crossing the floor, he threw open the windows that looked out above Broadway, though a wide sill, the top of a cornice, shut off a view directly down into the street. Then he turned back.

"Set the grips down here, McCroy," he said. "Then you may stay here if you like. I've got an errand to do down in the street. You might remain and tell any one who comes that I shall be back shortly."

"All right, sir," returned the other. "Would you mind if I go down to the cigar-stand and get some tobacco, sir? I—you will not object to my smoking, will you, sir?"

Vardon looked annoyed. "Why, I—" He looked up at the other and hastily changed his beginning. "Why, no, of course not. Why should I? Come down and I'll get you some tobacco myself."

"Thank you, sir. If you'll take it out of my pay for the work at the house, sir. I've only a few coppers left, sir."

They went to the elevator again. Vardon left the door of his room unlocked.

"You can get in without me when you come back, McCroy," he said.

When the car came up Vardon stepped back to allow his man to precede him. McCroy entered the elevator. At the moment Vardon bethought himself of some forgotten thing.

"Oh," he said, "don't wait for me. I've fogotten to get my bank-book. Go on down, McCroy. I'll meet you at the cigar-stand."

McCroy turned swiftly.

But the elevator operator was already closing the grated door and pulling his cable. For an instant the man of the woolen gloves made a gesture as if he would stop the other's act. Then he spoke quickly.

"Let me off at the next floor," he commanded peremptorily. "I must go back, too."

The operator stopped the car with a jerk and a scowl. "Say, what's the matter? Don't youse know when youse wants to go down?"

He grudgingly opened the door. McCroy slipped out without regarding the man's truculence. He ran around the cage and up the stairs, three at a time.

As he came to the top he saw Vardon just closing the office door again. He walked forward to meet his employer.

"Well!" Vardon stopped short at sight of him. "Thought you went down with the car!"

"I—thought—you see, I thought I'd better ask you to lock the door, sir," explained the man rather breathlessly. "It isn't safe to leave an office door open like that in a building of this sort. You can let me take the key—or I can wait below till you get back."

Vardon hesitated. He seemed more irritated than earlier. This fellow was as much a nuisance, somehow, as a man well could make himself, his look seemed to say.

"Very well," he grunted after a moment. "I'll give you the key."

His lips set grimly. Perhaps McCroy would not work long for him, as the man had himself suggested.

They waited while the car came up again.

"What did you say about Tinfoil this morning, McCroy? You say he was a thin man?"

"Eighteen years ago—yes, sir. He might be fat now, sir. Probably you yourself, sir, were not as heavy as you now are, eighteen years ago."

"I was thinking—," hesitated Vardon, as if he felt a necessity of explaining his question. Then he did not finish.

"Yes, I often think about them myself," answered his man.

The lights of the car climbed slowly up into view. The elevator man failed to bring his car quite up to the level of the top floor. He opened his door nevertheless and frowned instead of apologizing as the two passengers took the ten-inch step to the car-floor.

Then they descended.

They paused at the cigar counter in the half-lighted hallway within the building's entrance. Vardon tossed a quarter of a dollar on the glass counter.

"Give this man some tobacco of his choice, Billy," he said easily. Then he nodded to McCroy. "Be back in ten minutes," he remarked, and made somewhat hastily for the door.

McCroy picked up the quarter. "Give me some Blue Jam Plug cut," he said across the counter.

The salesman stared; then he shook his head. "Come again," he replied. "Never heard of it."

"Never heard of it?" repeated McCroy. "Oh, is that so? What brand you pushing as just as good? I can get it across the street."

He turned with irate fling of his shoulders and made for the entrance. He was not ten steps behind Vardon. The latter was standing at the edge of the pavement, waiting for a chance to cross between the vehicles of early traffic.

He looked around, started slightly, then appeared not to see his servant following him. But McCroy paused where he was.

Presently the stream of traffic opened in response to an upraised glove of white cotton. Vardon waited, unaccountably. Others crowded past him and over the street crossing to the other side.

Not till the cotton glove had descended and the traffic had started to close in again did he make a sudden decision to cross. Then he fairly darted out through the filling hole between cars and trucks and cabs and motors.

Instantly the other man was at his heels.

They crossed the cobbles almost together. Vardon looked carefully to right and left. He did not appear to notice the close crowding of the man behind.

In the middle of the car-tracks he hesitated, as if undecided whether to cross or go back ahead of the clanging car that bore down upon him. His sudden pause arrested the progress of the man immediately behind him. McCroy bumped into him.

For an instant it looked as if both men would be run down. A man shouted, the motorman crashed his gong till it sounded as if it would crack. A woman shrieked, and there was a grinding of brakes.

Then both men leaped forward, Vardon to the side, McCroy away to his left, but both clear of the tracks. The car slid past where they had stood.

"My God, McCroy! Was that you?" demanded Vardon, turning on the other.

"Me, sir. I thought you were going to get run over, sir, and I ran to—"

"How did you happen to be there? Are you following me?"

"Following you, sir? Of course not. I couldn't get the tobacco I wanted in there, if you don't mind, sir; and I was going to try across the street. I was just in time to see you make that rash move to get across the street ahead of the car, sir. You should always give everything on wheels the right of way, sir."

Vardon looked about him as if just becoming aware that they were still blocking traffic.

A truckman was shouting at them, with his horses' noses at their shoulders. The officer of the white gloves was running in their direction. Vardon made three quick strides to the curb.

McCroy scrambled after him. Then they stood together again, and each looked curiously in the other's eyes, oblivious to the harsh words that came from the lips of truckman and policeman alike.

"That was a very, very narrow escape, McCroy," said his employer slowly.

"I know it, sir, returned the man.

"For you, I mean," insisted Vardon.

"I understand, sir," answered McCroy.

"Well, you'd better be careful. Now, get your tobacco and go back to the office. Any one would think you and I were running a sort of — obstacle race this morning, from the time the newsboy brought that paper." He regarded his servant seriously.

"Yes, sir," assented McCroy, and smiled.

"Well—" hinted Vardon, as the other made no move.

"You didn't give me the key, sir."

"Oh, didn't I?"

Vardon's hand went into his pocket quickly. It was his left hand, and the motion pulled the sleeve back from his wrist. At the instant, McCroy bent to pick something up from the pavement.

He seemed not to take his eyes from the other man, however, as if he expected some new movement on his part.

Mr. Vardon pulled out a key in his gloved hand. He transferred it to the fingers of his right hand and held it out. McCroy took it.

"Thank you, sir."

"Go back, now. Somebody may be coming in."

"May I get my tobacco, sir?"

"Oh, of course." Vardon turned away and started down the street.

McCroy ran into the entrance of the little tobacco store below the curb level. But he did not go beyond the bottom steps and the door.

He turned again and started out upon the pavement. He looked after his master. He saw the other's broad shoulders swinging toward the corner.

He slipped across the pavement and stood in the crowd waiting there to cross at the next opportunity. He still kept Vardon in his eye.

Presently the latter turned quickly and looked back at the door of the tobacco shop. Then he stepped out of the stream of pedestrians and stared steadily as if waiting to see what his man would do next.

At McCroy's elbow a small boy came up out of the press. "Buy a papie, boss," he pleaded. "All about the moidie—'scription of the moidierer. Bald, bad eyes, scar on his wrist—

name Tinfoil Charley. Old pal give 'im away. 'Nonomous letter—'nother one this mornin'. Aw, buy a papie, boss!"

But McCroy looked at the youngster for an instant only, then back down the block.

"Horrible moidie, boss. Needle in the back o' the guy's head. Ain't you read about it yet?" persisted the boy. "Aw, buy a papie, boss. I'm stuck!"

Vardon, down the block, stirred away from the curb again. He began to come slowly and curiously back, his eyes still fastened on the door of the tobacco shop.

Then suddenly he stopped, seemed to consider some new idea and turned about with a whirl of his coat. He almost ran to the crossing below and then turned into the thick of the throng getting over Broadway there.

McCroy about faced on the instant. He nearly upset the boy beside him with the arm full of black headings in which the name Tinfoil glared up at him like a thing that stood alone. But he gave no heed.

He plunged out into the melee of passing wheels, dodged, skirted, leaped, crossed to the opposite side. Then he stretched his neck to see the corner. There were fewer people on this side now.

He caught Vardon's figure as it turned toward him.

He ducked inside the building, stepped quickly past the elevators and to the stairs. It was dark there. He shrank into the shadow and waited.

Next moment Vardon entered and walked into the elevator nearest the door. As soon as he stepped inside, McCroy followed.

The two looked at each other again. Vardon's eyes widened, as if in quick anger. McCroy's narrowed a little, then seemed to plead.

"What, you just getting back?" inquired Vardon.

"Yes, sir. But I wasn't long, was I, sir?"

Vardon frowned and looked at the elevator operator. They began to ascend. Up they went again to the sixth floor. Vardon did not answer his man's question till they stepped again from the car.

"I was not gone as long as I expected to be, I suppose," he vouchsafed then, while McCroy was slipping the key into the lock.

At the moment a man who had been hidden in the shadow at the end of the small hall stepped out. "Mr. Vardon?" he inquired.

Vardon turned sharply. "Yes. Who—oh, did the—starter send you up?"

The man turned back the lapel of his coat. On his waistcoat lay the badge of the plain-clothes man. Vardon glanced at it, then looked instantly at McCroy.

McCroy's eyes rested on the badge, then on the officer's face, finally coolly on Vardon.

"Come in," said Vardon, leading the way.

The other two stepped inside the door. Vardon turned about and closed it. McCroy crossed toward the open windows and stood with his back to the light.

In the gray hat that fitted and the gray overcoat that didn't fit, he made a sort of scare-crow silhouette against the window. His face could not be distinctly seen.

The plain-clothes man stood awkwardly to one side of the door and looked from one to the other of the two with curious interrogation.

Vardon hesitated a moment, then walked to his desk near the middle of the room. "Officer, what is your name?" he asked presently.

"Kearney, sir," replied the member of the police.

"Very well, Kearney. You are familiar with the details of the Brury murder?"

The officer straightened visibly. "Why, of course, sir."

"Can you describe Tinfoil Charley?" inquired Vardon.

nan's eyes opened in shment. "Of course I vered. "As much as any yet. He's a man of middle size, , near sighted and has a scar on his wrist—a circular letter B."

"Just so. And there's five thousand reward for him, isn't there?"

"Yes, sir. Have you got a clue, sir?"

"Have you a pair of nippers with you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Just stand there by the door then. This fellow here,"—he indicated the man of the woolen gloves, still standing by the window— "this fellow has a scar on his wrist, he is bald, he is near sighted. I want—"

But he did not finish. The man by the window suddenly crouched like a cat. He slipped one of his gloves from his fingers.

Vardon stopped talking to reach forward and pull open a drawer quickly. But he was not quick enough. He was fumbling inside when McCroy sprang.

There was an instant of violent scuffle, a grunt, a snarl. The plain-clothes man by the door was too slow of wit to interfere promptly and it was over even while he was beginning to walk forward, calling out and feeling for his gun.

The two men who had clenched fell apart as if they had been thrust away from each other. But McCroy's lips were laughing, while his eyes were ablaze. He waved something in his right hand, and turned to the officer.

"Who's bald now?" he cried.

The officer started. Vardon stood with his hands pressed against his temples. His head was as bare as a pippin.

The thing in McCroy's hand was a toupee that had been snatched from its snug fit upon the other's smooth cranium. The policeman uttered an imprecation half under his breath and stood still staring. Then he backed a step toward the door suggestively.

But neither of the others was looking at him now.

Vardon had dropped his hands and was crouching much as McCroy had crouched. Suddenly he jumped. McCroy, close to the window, tried to sidestep.

He tripped on a roll in the rug his own foot had kicked up a moment before. He staggered against the window-sill. Vardon turned toward him, but just missed touching him.

McCroy caught his feet, but to avoid the other stepped up upon the sill. He put a hand upon the sash, where it had been raised to elbow height.

Vardon stopped and stared at him. Then, without warning other than the widening of his eyes, he leaped, raised a foot and struck forward with it, the whole force of his body behind the pushing kick, aimed at the abdomen of the man on the sill.

It struck home.

McCroy's mouth emitted a gasp like a sob and he doubled like a pair of calipers. He let go of the sash, his body bending outward. But his hands came together in front of him, and the clawing fingers fastened in the fabric of the Vardon trousers.

He held on. Next moment he had fallen backward upon the ledge above the street, but the weight of his body had dragged the other man, helpless on one foot, to the sill.

Vardon screamed.

His hands struck upward at the sash. His fingers crashed through the glass and it fell in a silvery, jingling shower about his shining head. Then there was a moan, the rattle of boot-heels on the sill, the scrape of scratching finger-nails over wood, and—sill and cornice outside were suddenly empty.

The police officer stood beside the desk, his fat palms spread upon it, his mouth hanging open, the whites of his eyes gleaming in a circle about the dull brown of the retinas.

He looked like a man choking to death. It was a full half-minute be-

fore he turned and ran like a scurrying pig for the door.

Ten minutes later, on the pavement six floors below, the police were fighting back the Broadway crowd from too close pressing upon some tangled mass of formless things that lay on the stones.

Kearney, the plain-clothes man, stood holding in his hand two objects that drew the eyes of all who could look up from the bundled mass at his feet.

"Yes," he was saying to the lieutenant who stood at his side, "this came off the fat feller." He thumbed a thin sheet of paper and let his eyes run over the scrawled lines upon it.

"'You'll find Tinfoil Charley in office six hundred and two, Branch Building, Broadway,'" he read aloud.

Then he glanced at the other find in his fat palm. "And this," he added, "was on the thin one." He spread his hand with a little air of appreciating the dramatic opportunity.

He heard members of the crowd gasp with recognition all about him. He held a small diamond set in a moon of platinum. "It was in his overcoat pocket," he explained.

"They both got the the left wrist," announ per who had been be bodies. "They both a the fat guy's got glasses on vest. The other one's got a pair in a case in his pocket. Say—"

But he paused at that point, for the crowd pressed in so closely that he turned all his energy into the shoulder with which he caught the man immediately within reach a cruel jam under the chin.

"Tinfoil Charley!" Somebody outside the first row shouted it.

"Yeh," drawled the big lieutenant, grinning easily, as if he began to scent notoriety and to sense the feel of money in his palms. "Tinfoil Charley, all right."

Then he bent his head to look down at the two heaps of crumpled flesh and rags that had been separated now. "But I don't just know—how we're goin' to tell which. I don't know that. Do you, Kearney?"

The plain-clothes man stared at the two blue, bloodless faces, at a queerly bent in shoulder, at a backward twisted hand. He grunted. "Gosh!" he muttered. "I don't. Dam' 'f I do!"

ENTIRETY

By Gladys Hall

THERE isn't a day in the week, dear,
That some hour is not for you;
There isn't a beat of my heart, dear,
That doesn't beat strong and true.

There isn't a dream of my sleep, dear,
That hasn't your face to bless;
There isn't a drop of my blood, dear,
But hungers for your caress.

When God made my soul it was lifeless,
Nor answered his call until—
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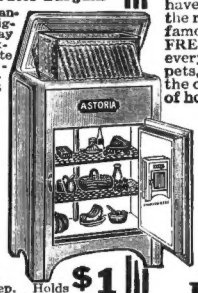

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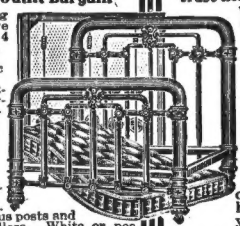

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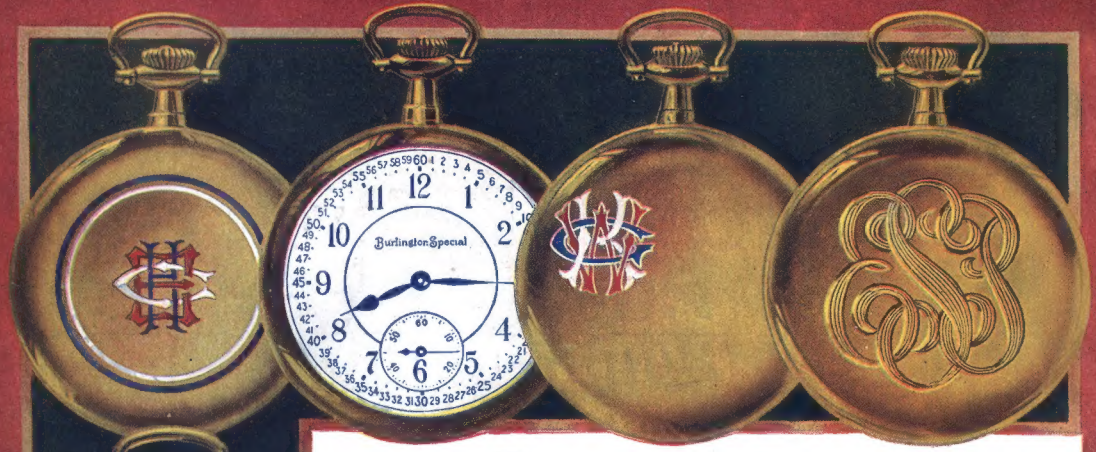

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